jured in the accident, but when the President got out to see what had happened, he tore his jacket sleeve on the car bumper, bumped his head, and stuck his thumb in his eye. Alert Secret Service agents immediately seized the thumb and wrestled it to the ground. . . . Concerning the collision, New Orleans district attorney Jim Garrison says he will immediately launch an investigation into the 'second car theory.'" The studio audience applauded boisterously.

The next week, Weekend Update's "top story" was the president's stubborn cold: "White House physicians say that, after a mild cold of that sort, it will take the President a few days to recover his motor skills fully, citing the period after his last cold when he tied his shoe to his hair blower and inadvertently pardoned Richard Nixon."

Then he turned to another joke: the former governor of California. "Starting a speaking tour this week . . . Reagan spoke out against marijuana, abortion, the Equal Rights Amendment, busing, and gun control legislation. When asked what he was for, Reagan replied, quote, 'hair dye.'"

Although the nation's new jester did not find Ronald Reagan nearly as pathetic as the hapless Leader of the Free World. Chase ended the segment "quoting" Reagan as saying that, like the Democratic right-wing populist former governor of Georgia, George Wallace, who had been crippled in a 1972 assassination attempt and was also angling his way toward a presidential announcement, he would be campaigning in a wheelchair: "It's not for the sympathy I would get. It just makes the race more fair."

FORD SOON FACED A NEW SET OF INTELLIGENCE CONTROVERSIES. FIRST Frank Church turned his hearings to political abuses by the Internal Revenue Service (among the thousands of dangerous extremists who allegedly had been politically singled out for audits were Joseph Alsop, James Brown, Nobel Prize–winning scientist Linus Pauling, and two United States senators). Then, hard upon new reports that the CIA had recruited Christian missionaries in defiance of an Eisenhower-era directive outlawing the practice, he revealed to Americans that Big Brother had also been opening their mail—more than 215,000 pieces in New York City alone between 1953 and 1973, including one, in 1968, from presidential candidate Richard Nixon to his speechwriter Ray Price.

Richard Helms, called back from Iran to testify, admitted it all was illegal. He then reintroduced Americans to a concept from the Watergate days: "plausible deniability." Conceding that he had signed a report in 1970 to Richard Nixon announcing such practices were to be discontinued, he admitted they had continued nonetheless, without the president's knowledge. "Because," he explained, "you've got to protect the President from the dirty stuff."

Over on the House side of the Capitol, feisty Bella Abzug of New York, eyeing a run against Senator James Buckley in 1976, publicized two government surveillance projects, code-named "SHAMROCK" and "MINARET," run by a government bureau that was so secret most Americans didn't even know it existed. "With a reputed budget of some $1.2 billion and a manpower roster far greater than the CIA," the Associated Press explained, the National Security Agency had been "established in 1952 with a charter that is still classified as top secret." (Its initials, the joke went, stood for "No Such Agency.") It had also, Abzug revealed, been monitoring both the phone calls and the telegrams of American citizens for decades. President Ford had persuaded Church not to hold hearings on the matter. Abzug proceeded on her own. At first, when she subpoenaed the private-sector executives responsible for going along with the programs, the White House tried to prevent their testimony by claiming that each participating private company was "an agent of the United States." When they did appear, they admitted their companies had voluntarily been turning over records and cables to the government at the end of every single day for more than forty years. The NSA said the programs had been discontinued. Abzug claimed they still survived, but under different names. At that, Church changed his mind: the contempt for the law here was so flagrant, he decided, he would initiate NSA hearings, too.

Conservative members of his committee issued defiant shrieks: "People's right to know should be subordinated to the people's right to be secure," said Senator John Tower. It would "adversely affect our intelligence-gathering capability," said Barry Goldwater. Church replied that this didn't matter if the government was breaking the law. He called the NSA's director to testify before Congress for the first time in history. Appearing in uniform, Lieutenant General Lew Allen Jr. obediently disclosed that his agency's spying on Americans was far vaster than what had even been revealed to the Rockefeller Commission. He admitted that it was, technically, illegal, and had been carried out without specific approval from any president. But he declined to explain how it worked. He added that thanks to such surveillance, "We are aware that a major terrorist attack in the United States was prevented." He refused to give further details on that, either—as if daring the senators to object.

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THE PRESIDENT COULD COMFORT HIMSELF WITH THE THOUGHT THAT few were paying attention. Back in August, Rockefeller Commission member Ronald Reagan had informed his listeners, "My own reaction after months of testimony and discussion during the investigation of the CIA is 'much ado about—if not nothing, at least very little'": just "instances of some wrongdoing with regard to keyhole peeking," long since corrected by the agency itself. He claimed his commission's most important finding—that more Soviet spies than ever were living and working in America—had been buried. Instead "the media seized upon whatever misdeeds we found and played them up, possibly to confirm the earlier charges and possibly because they thought they made for exciting drama."

That fall he acquired a surprising ally in the argument: Senator William J. Fulbright, whose devastating 1966 hearings against the Vietnam War were so subversive to the Establishment's amour propre that CBS cut away to a rerun of *The Andy Griffith Show* rather than continue live coverage. Now Fulbright published an article in the *Columbia Journalism Review.* He allowed that recent revelations about the CIA might be true. "But I have come to feel of late that these are not the kind of truths we need most right now; these truths which must injure if not kill a nation." What was needed was "restored stability and confidence." What the press required was "voluntary restraint" to reaffirm the "social contract." What the public most certainly did not need was the media's present "inquisition psychology."

In truth, though, the media were proving not very inquisitive at all. The *Washington Post*'s William Greider wrote in *Esquire* about the scanty coverage of the intelligence hearings, especially after the blanket coverage of Watergate, "There is a strong wish all over town, a palpable feeling that it would be nice if somehow this genie could be put back in the bottle . . . a nostalgic longing for the easy consensual atmosphere which once existed among the contending elements in Washington." He noted how "the press essentially tugs back and forth at itself, alternatively pushing the adrenal instincts unleashed by Watergate, the rabid distrust bred by a decade of out-front official lies, and then abruptly playing the cozy lapdog." And October, apparently, was a lapdog month.

Abzug's revelations received hardly any coverage. General Allen's testimony was buried in back pages (in the *Louisville Courier Journal* it was trumped by news of a religious community of 177 in Arkansas whose members pulled their children out of school to await the second coming of Christ). A stunning colloquy between Senator Walter Mondale, the liberal Democrat from Minnesota, and NSA deputy director Benson Buffham—

Mondale: "Were you concerned about its legality?"
Buffham: "Legality?"
Mondale: "Whether it was legal."
Buffham: "In what sense? Whether that would have been a legal thing to do?"
Mondale: "Yes."
Buffham: "That particular aspect didn't enter into the discussion."

—was not quoted anywhere at all, even by the *New York Times,* whose article on the NSA hearing ran on page eighty-one. As for the president, he followed the recommendation of Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney and closed down further inquiry into the NSA by extending executive privilege to the officials and telecommunications executives involved. This institutionalization of what had been a novel, and exceptionally controversial, legal doctrine in a brand-new presidential administration got no coverage, either.

A lot had changed since those English-muffin days when he said in his inaugural speech, "In all my public and private acts as your president, I expect to follow my instincts of openness and candor with full confidence that honesty is always the best policy in the end." Indeed, Ford had recently established a top-level White House working group, including Kissinger, Schlesinger, Rumsfeld, the CIA's budget director, and one of Ford's top legal counsels, to meet every single day and manage public relations to push back against the intelligence investigations. Perhaps that work explained why the investigating committees were so effectively rocked back on their heels by the next turn in the story.

Glamorous, globe-trotting Henry Kissinger had weathered his own Watergate storm—for bugging reporters and his own staffers—and remained the punditocracy's beau ideal. He was fresh from his latest triumph in "shuttle diplomacy," securing a preliminary peace framework between Israel and Egypt, when the indefatigable Otis Pike had the temerity to demand from him a memo by a State Department staffer named Thomas Boyatt that had apparently criticized the CIA's poor intelligence regarding the crisis in Cyprus, where the U.S. ambassador, Rodger Paul Davies, had been machine-gunned to death the previous August. The Pike Committee's chief counsel soon received a thundering phone call from the *Times*' James Reston: "What the hell are you guys doing down there? Are you reviving McCarthyism?"

This, it turned out, was the administration's public relations line—Pike was running a "McCarthyite inquisition," as State Department official Lawrence Eagleburger said in his testimony before the committee. An editorial called "Pike's Pique" noted that by calling "junior staff officers to testify under oath about what recommendations they made to the policy officials," the congressman was reintroducing the practice that "almost wrecked the U.S. Foreign Service during the McCarthy period." Then, since Kissinger forbade such junior staffers to testify, the Church Committee voted to subpoena Kissinger himself—and the *Times*' editorialists called that "neo-McCarthyism," too. Kissinger decided to testify before the Pike Committee the day after General Allen of the NSA, on October 30, though on his own terms: he summarized what he said was the thrust of Boyatt memo, still withholding the actual document from evidence—just the sort of Stennis-style compromise that, when Richard Nixon had proposed it during the crisis of October 1973, had sent *tout* Washington up in arms.

Ron Dellums, the socialist from Berkeley, who had once set up an exhibit of American war crimes in Vietnam outside his congressional office, took his turn to question Kissinger. Dellums cited Kissinger's perch atop the shadowy "40 Committee," which reviewed every covert U.S. intelligence operation; his overlapping jobs as national security advisor and secretary of state; and "testimony that you have participated in directing operations which were not fully discussed, analyzed, or evaluated by those authorized to do so"—and which had been "purposefully hidden." He noted, "You have been involved in wiretaps of employees," and thundered, "You now refuse information to Congress on a rather specious basis."

Convinced he had the Establishment's darling in his sights, Dellums moved in for the kill.

"Frankly, Mr. Secretary," he said, "and I mean this very seriously... the method of your operation... may indeed be contrary to the law."

Kissinger paused with a comedian's art. He smiled: "Except for that, there is nothing wrong with my operation?" The hearing room erupted in laughter.

That was the clip that ran on the evening newscasts: a witty man humiliating a dour one. A quip had been all it took to turn the allegedly "McCarthyite" inquisition aside. Maybe people had had enough of inquisitions: suffering, the *Washington Post* had recently suggested—after My Lai, after Cambodia, after Watergate, after the year without Christmas lights, after Patty Hearst and all the rest—"a kind of deadening of moral nerve-ends, a near inability to be surprised, let alone disturbed."

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NEW YORKERS WERE SURPRISED AND DISTURBED.

In the middle of the month, after trustees of the teachers' union pension fund refused a City Hall plea to help out by buying city bonds, lawyers drew up a bankruptcy petition ("The City of New York is unable to pay its debts or obligations as they mature"). Governor Carey announced an austerity plan he said went "to the limits of what we can apply to the city in terms of economies." President Ford considered backtracking on the question of a bailout. Top advisors proposed he sign a package of loans for the city working its way through Congress. "Hell, no!" Donald Rumsfeld bellowed back at a cabinet meeting. He spoke for the mood of the room.

On October 29, at high noon, the president made a luncheon address at the National Press Club carried, unlike the Pike and Church committee proceedings, live on all three networks. He described the latest eleventh-hour stopgap to keep New York solvent, passed the previous week in Albany. He outlined Mayor Beame's argument that "unless the federal government intervenes, New York City within a short time will no longer be able to pay its bills." And he responded with William Simon's and Ronald Reagan's arguments: it was all New York City's fault, for giving away candy it could not afford. And he wouldn't stand for it.

"I can tell you, and tell you now, that I am prepared to veto any bill that has as its purpose a federal bailout of New York City to prevent default.... If they can scare the whole country into providing that alternative... it would promise immediate rewards and eventual rescue to every other city that follows the tragic example of our largest city." He proposed bankruptcy proceedings in federal court instead. "Other cities," he concluded, "other states, as well as the federal government, are not immune to the insidious disease from which New York City is suffering. This sickness is brought on by years and years of higher spending, higher deficits, more inflation, and more borrowing to pay for higher spending, higher deficits, and so on, and so on, and so on. It is a progressive disease, and there is no painless cure.... If we go on spending more than we have, providing more benefits and services than we can pay for, then a day of reckoning will come to Washington and the whole country just as it has to New York." And when "that day of reckoning comes, who will bail out the United States of America?"

In the editorial offices of the *New York Daily News* the talk was of how the press conference reminded them of a line in the 1950 George Cukor screwball comedy, *Born Yesterday:* "Would you do me a favor, Harry?" deadpans Judy Holliday. "What?" replies Broderick Crawford.

"Drop dead!" Someone scrawled a headline, as a joke. Someone else looked it over: "Holy Christ, yes! Put it in the paper."

Next morning. FORD TO CITY: DROP DEAD. It was accompanied by a photograph in which the formerly amiable butterer of English muffins appeared to be sneering.

It was the day before Halloween—and open season on New York. *Newsweek*'s cover starred Abe Beame, swaddled like a baby, Gerald Ford spanking him over his knee. *Newsweek* quoted Lester Maddox, the racist Atlanta restaurateur elected governor of Georgia in 1966 after having run blacks off his property with an ax handle, now an authority on municipal finance: "The thing I don't like about New York is the tendency to reward bums and penalize hard work." *Newsweek* columnist Milton Friedman, the conservative economist, wrote that the city shared an "instinct for self-destruction matched only by its exaggerated sense of self-importance." Theodore White, who in his "Making of the President" series used to present the expansion of the liberal state as self-evidently wise, wrote in *New York* magazine, "New York City has now reached the point where it is entirely incapable of self-government," and called the city's political pressure groups "a giant Soviet."

On this subject, the president was in sync with the mood of the nation. And yet somehow at exactly the same time it became open season on *him*.

Halloween fell on a Friday. On Saturday, news broke that the Ford campaign's finance chair, David Packard, had resigned. Having set a goal in July to raise $10 million by the time of the Republican convention, with a little more than two-thirds of that time to go he had found only $600,000. The *New York Times* observed, "Mr. Packard's resignation served to underscore the difficulty Mr. Ford appeared to have in getting his campaign under way—an unusual problem for an incumbent president." Then, that Sunday, in Florida (site of the third presidential primary), at a dinner honoring the visiting president of Egypt, the tuxedo-clad president toasted "the people of Israel."

In Washington, gossip circulated about extraordinary doings in the White House. On Monday night, all became plain. The president appeared in the East Room, with the entire White House press corps and the network cameras assembled before him, and revealed the biggest cabinet shakeup in the history of the Republic.

"*Good evening. I have several announcements to make tonight*":

At the Department of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld for James Schlesinger. At the National Security Council, Brent Scowcroft for Henry Kissinger. Dick Cheney to replace Donald Rumsfeld as chief of staff, Elliot Richardson for Rogers Morton at Commerce. At CIA, George H. W. Bush for William Colby (later believed to have been fired for being too cooperative with Congress's investigation of his agency)—on and on it went, like clowns stumbling out of a tiny car at the circus. Or maybe, Washington hands thought, more like something out of *The Godfather*. Someone thought to call the interlocking set of simultaneous bureaucratic assassinations the "Halloween Massacre."

News of another bureaucratic assassination—or had it been a suicide?—had broken earlier in the day. For months the blood feud between the vice president and the conservative Republicans who despised him had transfixed the Georgetown villagers. In spring came rumors that Rockefeller might be dropped from the 1976 ticket. Then the president's pal Mel Laird floated the idea of an "open convention" to choose the next running mate. If this was bait for Reagan fans, they gladly rose to it: in June a conclave of conservative senators said the idea "would be in the best interests of the Republican Party and the nation." In July reporters grilled campaign manager Bo Callaway about why there were no pictures of Rockefeller at Ford-for-President headquarters. He admitted, "A lot of Reagan people are not supporters of Rockefeller, and I want it clear to them that we want their support whether they support Rockefeller or not." Jacob Javits, the liberal Republican senator, then warned that dumping Rockefeller would "endanger the President's support from the whole centrist bloc in the country."

In the fall, to shore up Rockefeller's political position, the president announced the vice president would appear before a series of public forums. Rockefeller landed in Tampa for the first one back on Wednesday, October 29. To the reporters badgering him on the tarmac, he claimed "I honestly don't know" what the president would say in that evening's address on New York's fiscal situation, adding, "I have been totally supportive of President Ford's position"—which was rich, given that barely two weeks earlier he had said a federal failure to bail out the city would be a "catastrophe."

Then that Monday morning the White House released a letter from Rockefeller to his boss announcing, "After much thought, I have decided further that I do not wish my name to enter into your consideration for the upcoming Republican Vice Presidential nominee." The *Times* quoted an unnamed White House official who said "that Mr. Rockefeller had been unable to make his peace with the right wing of the Republican Party. He was, therefore, regarded as a liability by the President Ford Committee." Mac Mathias said it proved Ford had become "a captive of the Reagan right."

* * *

ROCKEFELLER HAD WITHDRAWN FROM THE POLITICAL FIELD. AND BY THE end of the night, the man whose Washington ascent he had sponsored, Henry Kissinger, had lost his perch atop the National Security Council, which had given him daily access to the president in the Oval Office.

The speculation immediately began: Was the Halloween Massacre about placating the right? But if so, why had Ford cashiered conservatives' favorite cabinet officer, James Schlesinger? And what to make of the fact that the president's *new* national security advisor, Brent Scowcroft, was a trusted Kissinger deputy—"replacing Kissinger with Kissinger," as one senator put it?

In the East Room, the reporters' grilling commenced, *sans* mercy. First question: had Rockefeller "sacrificed himself on your political behalf, and have you in any way urged him to do so?" The president dissembled, convolutedly: "The decision by the Vice President was a decision on his own."

And then, when another reporter soon asked the same question, he repeated the same thing, as if he had rehearsed it. And then, a few questions after *that*, when asked what reasons Rockefeller gave for his decision, Ford said Rockefeller's letter, which in fact said virtually nothing, "speaks for itself."

Someone asked if the reason was New York City. Ford responded, "Our differences over the handling of New York City are minimal"—then, like a mynah bird, repeated, "I think the letter speaks for itself."

RON NESSEN KEPT A SIGN UP IN HIS OFFICE: "WATERGATE IS HARDER TO wash away than the spray of a skunk." It helped explain one thing Gerald Ford was trying to accomplish with his bureaucratic coup, getting rid of Nixon holdovers. That backfired. The "Halloween Massacre" moniker recalled another shocking weekend firing—the Saturday Night Massacre. Jules Witcover called the press conference "worthy of Nixon at his most trapped mien" and said the president had just burned away "one of his few strengths—personal warmth and integrity." Ford had hoped to finally establish an image as his own man—an accidental president no more. That backfired, too. A reporter had asked, "How do you make a high-level personnel shift of this kind, such a fast shift? Did you do this largely on your own." Ford responded, "I did it totally on my own." He was protesting too much—as the lead article in the next morning's *Washington Post*, syndicated nationwide, made embarrassingly plain:

> WASHINGTON—White House chief of staff Donald H. Rumsfeld, considered the master maneuverer of the Ford Administration, was widely credited Monday for being the silent architect of the President's dramatic cabinet shakeup.
>
> The soft-spoken, hard-driving former Illinois congressman emerged as the big winner of the Byzantine battle for power that went on behind the closed doors of the supposedly open Ford administration.
>
> Not only did Rumsfeld wind up with an important cabinet post and equal access with Henry Kissinger to President Ford. He also left behind him in the White House as chief of staff his deputy, Richard Cheney, who is considered both highly capable and totally loyal to Rumsfeld. . . .
>
> Rumsfeld left no fingerprints on any of his internal recommendations that helped produce the shakeup within the White House.
>
> He was not even around Sunday when Mr. Ford fired Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger and Central Intelligence Agency Director William E. Colby. Instead, Rumsfeld took a rare day off and went to the Washington Redskins–Dallas Cowboys football game. . . .
>
> He also presumably made himself available for the vice presidential vacancy that was created by the withdrawal of Nelson Rockefeller from the 1976 ticket.

There weren't supposed to have been any "silent architects" in Gerald Ford's ultratransparent White House. Nor any "Byzantine" battles for power. And yet here, on the front page of the *Washington Post*, the nation's next secretary of defense, a man most people outside Washington wouldn't recognize, whose qualifications to be defense secretary as Ford described them at his press conference ("a person who is experienced in the field of foreign policy and who served in the Department of Defense as a naval aviator") sounded conspicuously thin, was depicted as the power behind the throne.

Moderates were not placated: the piece also quoted highly placed sources who said that Kissinger was incensed by the changes. Another facet of the political mess was that rumors soon surfaced insisting that Rockefeller had not jumped but had been pushed. But even that didn't placate the conservatives: "I am not appeased," was Ronald Reagan's response. Meanwhile, at his own press conference, Rockefeller was badgered by questions about whether *he'd* run for president in 1976.

Time noted that though he sounded angry, Reagan "could only feel helped by President's Ford's clumsy handling of the Cabinet shake ups and his diminished credibility." It cited a Gallup poll taken before the massacre that had Ford ahead among Republicans 58 to 36 percent—and an NBC poll taken afterward that gave it to Reagan, 44 to 43 percent.

"MR. PRESIDENT," FORD HAD BEEN ASKED IN THE EAST ROOM, "HOW worried are you about Ronald Reagan?" He answered that he was not. It was just about the only nakedly honest thing he said that night.

Reagan, Ford told confidants, was a lightweight. Barry Goldwater himself told Ford's staffers there was no way Reagan could win in big states. Ford could be cheered that his campaign had righted itself somewhat. His finance chairman had failed, yes; Bo Callaway was gaffe-prone; but the campaign had meanwhile poached two impressive technicians from the enemy camp: the pioneering political consultant Stuart Spencer, who had fashioned Reagan into a credible gubernatorial challenger in 1966, and F. Clifton White, an unsung conservative hero who had wired the insurgent movement that delivered the Republican nomination to Barry Goldwater in 1964.

Supreme Court justice William O. Douglas, an old adversary, was about to retire, so soon Ford would get to display the mighty power of his office by picking a lifetime replacement. Ford's wife, it turned out, was not a liability. In fact it seemed to be just the opposite. A new Harris poll revealed that 64 percent supported and only 23 percent opposed what she said about her daughter's theoretical affair. Seventy percent liked her views on the Equal Rights Amendment. All in all, Lou Harris wrote, "Betty Ford has become one of the most popular wives of a President to occupy the White House." Whatever the wages of Halloween, Ford was confident; he was, after all, an incumbent president—still careening around the country for personal appearances even in the face of testimony from the Treasury secretary that he had faced 320 death threats in twenty days that fall alone.

But in a suspicious age, as compared with the past, the advantages of incumbency broke differently.

In October 1974, haunted by testimony from the Ervin Committee's green table about suitcases filled with cash, negotiable securities, and checks laundered through Mexican banks, Congress passed, and Ford signed, amendments to the Federal Election Campaign Act that had the potential to revolutionize the way elections were financed. Among these measures was a $1,000 limit on what any one individual could contribute to a campaign, a cap on primary spending and general election spending of $10 million for each major party's presidential candidate, strict standards of campaign disclosure, and the public provision of up to $5 million in "matching funds" for any candidate for federal office who raised at least $5,000 in contributions of $250 or under in each of twenty states. It provided for a new agency, the Federal Election Commission, to adjudicate these and other rules. It all was one reason the Reagan political team was keeping its man from announcing an official candidacy until as late as possible before the New Hampshire primary, set for February 24: that way, the disgusted editorialists of the *Boston Globe* pointed out, Reagan could conduct "a national campaign, in the guise of operating a business, for almost a year before he announced," evading "every reporting regulation for political organizations."

That didn't prevent Friends of Ronald Reagan, the organization officially purporting not to be a presidential campaign, from now making an aggressive play for strict scrutiny of the president by the new FEC. The Republican National Committee was paying for the president's travels, money that would be reimbursed by the new system's matching funds. The Reagan exploratory committee said its not-candidate should get the same deal—because there was no reason to assume the president was actually even "the titular leader of his party." The FEC announced it would rule on that challenge by the end of November.

And then there was the Ford campaign organization's other liability: the candidate himself.

On November 7 he headed off to Massachusetts; there was a primary there March 2, and New Hampshire was just over the border. On the tarmac at Westover Air Force Base, he announced he would enter every primary in the nation. That caught his campaign strategists by horrified surprise, considering how Nixon's pledge to campaign in every state doomed him in 1960: it took careful strategic targeting to win a marathon national election. He then tripped over a wheelchair. Or so it at least appeared to some. A Secret Service agent, conversely, presumed his lurch tarmac-ward had been effectuated by an excited little boy's American flag, which the agent brutishly wrested from the kid's hand; it looked like a scene from one of Chevy Chase's Weekend Updates.

Then, speaking before New England business leaders, Ford defensively addressed critics of his personnel shifts: "I want to be absolutely sure these domestic political potshots are not 'heard 'round the world.' . . . The temptation to political adversaries to take advantage of any apparent weakness, disunity, and decision could become irresistible. . . . Weakness invites war. . . . Without a clear consensus among the 214 million Americans . . . the ability of a President to carry out his constitutional duties would be dangerously diminished." The *Globe* editorialized with distaste, "His confusion between his personal political fortunes and the well-being of the nation was disturbingly reminiscent of Richard Nixon."

It was a Friday—which meant *Saturday Night Live* was on the next night. This time, after a week's hiatus, opening the show, Chevy Chase upped the satirical stakes by *playing* the president. Onscreen: the familiar presidential podium, a pitcher of water, two glasses. Chase entering, tuxedo-clad, to "Hail to the Chief," bumping into the flag, dropping his papers, fumblingly scooping them up:

"My fellow Americans, ladies and gentlemen, members of the press, and my immediate family. First, may I thank you all for being here. And I am in my immediate family.

"First, may I thank you all for being here"—Absent-mindedly, the Nutty President repeated himself—"and I am in my immediate family."

He announced the show's host: "Harvey" Cosell.

He poured water into one of the glasses. Then drank from another, empty glass.

One awkward pause, one pratfall, one head-banging fall to the podium ("Whoop! No problem! Okay! No problem! Sorry! No problem!"), and one more sip from the empty water glass later:

"I know a fella who is going to enter the New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Florida, and every other primary! And I *know* he is going to win! And if he has *any* other competition, right up to the end of 1976—"

(He thumped once more to the floor. "Uh-oh! No problem! No problem!")

"And if I *don't* win, I will *continue* to run, even if there are none! And now for my second announcement—"

He made the announcement from the floor, after tripping over two folding chairs:

"Live from New York! It's Saturday night!"

It wasn't fair. Every public figure constantly on TV sometimes stumbles. It wasn't the president's fault that a car hit his limousine, or that it was raining that spring in Austria when he had been gentlemanly enough to concentrate on his wife's safety instead of his own; or that he was hobbled from knee surgery in 1972. In fact, he was the most physically accomplished man to have ever held the office: a triple letterman in football, basketball, and track in high school; an all-American center on the gridiron at the University of Michigan, passing up offers to join the Green Bay Packers and Detroit Lions in order to go to law school; an expert skier whom far-younger Secret Service men had a hard time keeping up with at Vail (his excuse that "every skier takes a fall once in a while" didn't help when, in December 1975, the TV cameras caught him collapsing in a heap). No one had thought to consider him clumsy when he acceded to the office the previous August. In fact, back then, the comedian Rich Little, who'd risen to stardom on the back of his Nixon impression, complained he was having a hard time finding anything funny to imitate about Gerald Ford at all. "The trouble is that the President is not visual: he has no distinct mannerisms."

Comedians didn't worry about that now.

Some new President Ford jokes:

The only thing between Nelson Rockefeller and the presidency is a banana peel.

Why won't Ford help New York in the fiscal crisis? He was once trapped there for six hours on an escalator.

Why won't Ford be throwing out the first pitch on Opening Day? The Secret Service is worried he'll be beaned in the head.

Woody Allen, by way of Patty Hearst: "It's possible it was all a result of my brainwashing but I was then brought into a room where President Gerald Ford shook my hand and asked me if I would follow him around the country and take a shot at him now and then, being careful to miss. He said it would give him a chance to act bravely and could serve as a distraction from genuine issues, which he felt unequipped to deal with."

And just in time for Chevy Chase's onslaught that November, the first book about Ford as president came out. It was called *A Ford, Not a Lincoln*, and in it, Richard Reeves described him as "slow, plodding, pedestrian, unimaginative," "inarticulate," and "ignorant"—though you didn't have to take Reeves's word for it. He also quoted the president's Grand Rapids pastor: "Gerald Ford is a normal, decent, God-fearing man, but you can say that about a lot of people."

THERE IS A MEDIEVAL POLITICAL MAXIM THAT "THE KING HAS TWO BODIES." A "body natural," that is to say—the real one that he carts around day to day, like any ordinary mortal—and a "body politic"—his symbolic presence as head of state. A president also has two bodies. The symbolic one glows on the TV screen, emanating a two-hundred-year-old nation's authority, of the safe, solid power of the free world, tangible evidence of the continued smooth functioning of a superpower. Now that America's power seemed neither safe nor solid, however, the continuity of its institutions was no longer guaranteed, and the president's two bodies collapsed one into the other—and his corporeal self was cast as a fourth member of the Three Stooges, to star in an allegory about a nation that no longer worked.

The evidence accumulated apace. In Pennsylvania, on October 21, the state secretary of heath had announced the discovery of a mysterious new disease, "pantosomatitis," said to be contagious, chronic, extremely painful, and fatal in 2.5 to 3 percent of cases; involving dozens of widely varying symptoms; and spreading up and down the East Coast. The news understandably transfixed the nation. Then, ten days later, the Associated Press reported that the researchers the physician claimed helped him make the discovery had never worked with him and that no medical publication or writer had been able to verify it actually existed.

On October 23, Mike Royko wrote of meeting a lawyer at a party and asking him what kind of law he practiced: "'I fix,' he said." Royko wasn't sure he'd heard him correctly. "'You fix cases?' I asked. 'Judges?' He nodded. When he saw the look of surprise on my face he looked amused. And he said that if I quoted him by name, he would naturally deny it and sue the pants off me." His new friend said he didn't even know how to file a lawsuit or appear in a courtroom: "He has done nothing but fix." Royko thought he'd seen it all in twenty years as a hard-drinking Chicago newsman. But this brazenness was a new one on him.

It was an appropriate moment for Gallup, on October 30, to release its latest poll on public trust: Sixty-eight percent thought the country's leaders "consistently lied to the American people"; in 1972 that figure had been but 38 percent. And Americans hadn't even heard yet of the Halloween Massacre. Nor of the claim, in a story that broke four days later, that defense contractor Martin Marietta kept a hunting lodge where it plied Pentagon officials with prostitutes.

That was nothing compared with the story that broke on November 19. In 1964, a little more than a month before Martin Luther King was set to travel to Stockholm to accept the Nobel Peace Prize, the FBI sent him a package of unspecified material meant to blackmail him, accompanied by an anonymous letter. A Church Committee counsel read it aloud at an open hearing: "You know you are a complete fraud a great liability to all of us negroes. The American public will know you for what you are, an evil abnormal beast. King, there is one thing left to do. You [know] what it is. You are done. There is but one way out for you. You better take it before your filthy, abnormal, fraudulent self is bared to the nation . . . you have just 34 days." Part of a seven-year FBI campaign of harassment against King, the letter was an attempt to spur the civil rights leader to suicide. Another letter that was entered into evidence, from deputy FBI director William C. Sullivan to J. Edgar Hoover and dated a little less than two years earlier, revealed the motive. It proposed "taking him completely off his pedestal." "This can be done

and will be done. Obviously, confusion will reign . . . the Negroes will be left without a national leader."

The news set off a flurry of morbid speculation. Royko, reflecting on a presumed kook who insisted the FBI had rubbed out Martin Luther King in 1968, remembered back when he could have dismissed that as ridiculous; now, "all I could say was, 'I don't know.'" Coretta Scott King, the great man's widow, called for an investigation of just that charge, and even the *New York Times* observed that given the kind of things the Church Committee was turning up, "the very least once can wonder, considering the late FBI director J. Edgar Hoover's feelings about Dr. King, is whether he could have put his agency's whole heart into the investigation of the assassination." The *Saginaw News* editorialized that though such speculation was "chilling," it was "hardly more chilling than testimony already a matter of record concerning alleged spy network involvement with organized crime in the field of international assassinations."

That fact was confirmed as far more than mere speculation on November 20, when the Church Committee, once more over strenuous White House objections, released a 346-page report titled *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders*. It established that the CIA had tried to off Fidel Castro eight times, had supplied weapons to the plotters against the Dominican Republic's Rafael Trujillo (the plotters succeeded, though not with the CIA's weapons), and had encouraged but not directly intervened in the assassinations of three more, including Ngo Diem Dinh in November 1963—the same South Vietnamese president whom America (and the CIA) had financed and backed for almost a decade prior. It also reported that the CIA helped a group that kidnapped a Chilean general who stood in the way of their attempt to overthrow Salvador Allende.

That morning a spokesman for the Justice Department announced that it was weighing whether to bring criminal charges against those involved in the assassination plots the report described. That night, Daniel Schorr said on the CBS news, "It seems, according to this report, to be true (as ex-director Richard Helms has said) that the CIA never *assassinated* any foreign leaders. It seems also to be true that it wasn't for want of trying." Editorials the next morning called the revelations "shocking and disturbing," "revolting," "inexcusable by any standards of international morality and diplomatic expediency." Moral government, insisted the *New York Times*, "is not the impractical dream of naive do-gooders. It is the only inherent strength of a self-governing nation."

But if that were so, it was hard to see how Church's report might help heal the wound. In fact, it only compounded the nation's enervated confusion, complicating a debate that had rumbled across the entire season of inquiry: Who, exactly, was supposed to be blamed? And if no one knew whom to blame, how could the crisis be fixed?

Frank Church's own contribution was not always helpful. Some derided him as a stuffy, pompous moralist, an orator above all—"Frank Sunday School," they called him, or sometimes, even better, "Frank Cathedral." When he was fourteen years old, in 1939, a letter he wrote urging isolationism was printed on the front page of a Boise newspaper. He then served with honor as an intelligence officer in World War II, earning a Bronze Star; then, at twenty-three, he survived what his doctors thought was fatal cancer. Nine years later, in 1956, "the boy wonder from Idaho" was elected to the Senate—where he displayed courage proper to someone who had cheated death.

But not always. For he was also a *senator*, possessed of the bland passion for compromise then native to that tribe. And, at that, a presidential aspirant—possessed by the omnidirectional imperative to placate the myriad factions and personalities of that most fractured of political tribes, the Democratic Party. A successful Democratic presidential nominee also had to defer to the memory of that party's beloved martyred Hero in Chief; all that certainly helped explain the certain curious willful resistance Church displayed in following his own evidence where it frequently led. He had imagined, when he took on this inquiry as his own, that it would help put the final nails in the coffin for the legacy of Richard M. Nixon. He hardly knew how to respond when so many of the most frightening discoveries pointed instead to the administration of John F. Kennedy—at whose 1960 convention he had delivered a striking keynote speech.

In July he gave a press conference in which he used a memorable phrase: *rogue elephant*. He said there was a "very real possibility" that the Central Intelligence Agency conceived and attempted assassinations on its own, without the knowledge of anyone outside the agency—that the CIA "may have been behaving like a rogue elephant on a rampage." It proved a comforting notion to an establishment longing for innocence. It was abetted by the intelligence community's very manner of operation—the layers of plausible denial baked into the CIA cake. On the first day of the public hearings in September, for instance, Senator Mondale had suggested that "things are occurring in deliberate contravention and disregard of official orders." But he quickly grew exasperated asking low-level agents just who had approved their actions, and hearing in response: "Well, I don't know—you'll have to ask someone

higher up." The same pattern repeated itself up and up and up the chain of command. "[T]hey all said the same thing," he later reflected; "none of them knew who had authorized anything. The process was clearly designed for fog—to hide responsibility and prevent anyone from ever being called to account." He compared affixing ultimate responsibility to nailing Jell-O to a wall. Very soon, however, he arrived at the famous conclusion President Harry Truman displayed on his desk: The Buck Stops Here. With the Presidents of the United States. And, in any event, by October 30, when Henry Kissinger testified, surely to protect his own skin, that every covert action undertaken by the American intelligence community was personally approved by the president, the "rogue elephant" theory would have seemed to be largely refuted.

But that didn't keep Senator Church from writing in his November 20 assassination report, "Even after our long investigation, it is unclear whether the conflicting and inconclusive state of the evidence is due to the system of plausible denial or whether there were, in fact, serious shortcomings in the system of authorization"—this despite his own report reaching, to take one example, a "reasonable inference" that President Eisenhower had authorized the coup against President Patrice Lumumba of the Congo in 1960.

And so, for those few scattered Americans seriously following the intelligence investigations, a fundamental and fundamentally disturbing question lingered: Were our presidents lawless and wicked? Or just bumbling nobodies, Gerald Fords, every last one of them—dumb, ignorant pawns of secret police agencies?

To ask the question was to stare into an abyss. So Senator Church papered over the abyss.

He appended a three-paragraph epilogue to the committee report—and found it so important he read it aloud to reporters: "The committee does not believe that the acts which it has examined represent the real American character. . . . They do not reflect the ideals which have given the people of this country and of the world hope for a better, fuller, fairer life. We regard the assassination plots as aberrations." (He did not note that the "aberrations" spanned two decades and four presidential administrations.) "The United States," he continued, "must not adopt the tactics of the enemy." He concluded, "Despite our distaste for what we have seen, we have great faith in this country. The story is sad, but this country has the strength to hear the story and to learn from it. We must remain a people who confront our mistakes and resolve not to repeat them. If we do not, we will decline, but if we do, our future will be worthy of the best of our past."

The *Washington Post* singled out that epilogue for applause: "To believe otherwise is to assault the basic process of consensus and correction by which a democratic society must proceed." The *Milwaukee Journal* ran it on the front page, under the headline "MORAL FOR U.S." As instructive was the number of newspapers that ran nothing at all about the Church Committee assassination report on their front pages. Like the *Tri-City Herald* of Dubuque, Iowa, and environs, where it was trumped by news of butter prices, the political progress of the Communist Party in Portugal, a government effort to regulate unsafe Christmas lights, and the question of whether the Ford campaign would get equal time when stations showed Ronald Reagan movies—as well as the story "Blind Bow Hunter Bags Deer."

Mary McGrory, downplaying Church's pulling of punches, and contradicting her colleagues on the *Post* editorial page, wrote in a column titled "Sen. Church's Topic: The Nation's Soul" that "if this country is ready to face the facts about itself Church could become our next president."

Or, if the nation's soul tended otherwise, the presidency might go to someone who preferred stories of patriotic reassurance.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

"Has the Gallup Poll Gone Bananas?"

RONALD REAGAN HAD ALWAYS SAID, WHEN ASKED IF HE WAS RUNNING FOR president, that a man does not seek the office; the office seeks him. A rescuer, after all, does not ask to rescue. He must be summoned.

When Ronald Reagan flew on commercial flights he always sat in the first row. That way he could greet passengers as they boarded. One day he was flying between Los Angeles and San Francisco. A woman threw her arms around him and said, "Oh, Governor, you've got to run for president!"

"Well," he said, turning to Michael Deaver, dead serious, "I guess I'd better do it."

Yes: he had been summoned. That was early in 1975. He had likely been running in his mind ever since. On November 20, one week before Thanksgiving Thursday, and the day the seal of the United States Senate was affixed to the conclusion that America's secret spy agency plotted the murder of leaders of sovereign states, he made it official.

PUBLICLY HE HAD KEPT HIS OWN COUNSEL IN ALL THOSE INTERVENING months; Ronald Reagan could be quite disciplined politically when he put his mind to it. It was spring before he told a meeting of supporters that he was disillusioned enough with Jerry Ford to run. The White House sent emissaries to hint that he might make a nice running mate for Ford, then offered him a job as commerce secretary; they failed to dissuade him. The conservatives pining for a third political party asked him to become their candidate; but any temptations Reagan felt in that directions were scotched when Holmes Tuttle, first among equals in his "kitchen cabinet" of wealthy backers, told him he wouldn't see another penny if that was what he decided. Late in April, at Reagan's home in Pacific Palisades, *National Review* publisher and third-party enthusiast William Rusher presented Reagan with a copy of his new book, *The Making of the New Majority*, and tried one more time:

"The GOP won't nominate you in 1976," Rusher said.

"Well, now, that remains to be seen," Reagan responded.

He was ready to fight for the Republican nomination. On the day of the fall of Saigon, columnist Robert Novak flew with him in a small private prop plane from a triumphant appearance in Mississippi to his next speech, in Florida, before a pharmaceutical convention (for the standard five-thousand-dollar fee). Something was different about Reagan, Novak decided. In their previous encounters it was almost as if the old trouper was reading from a script. Perhaps it was the frightening thunderstorm rattling the plane. But now he behaved entirely differently. He favored Novak with some of the jokes that his staff forbade him to tell in public, ones literally learned at his late mother's knee. (Nelle Reagan was proud of her comic accents, and her son had studied well: "His Jewish dialect was hilarious," Novak recollected.) He told tales out of school about Hollywood executives, about the dark years after his marriage broke up. ("I tried to go to bed with every starlet in Hollywood, and I damn near succeeded.")

Then, another triumph before the pharmaceutical executives. Then, a backroom conclave with Republican pols in Atlanta. Then, a speech to the students of Georgia Tech (he said the Democratic Congress had "blood on its hands" for losing Vietnam—an implicit thumb in the eye of a president who had just implored the nation to avoid "recrimination or assessments of blame"). Then he took on détente: "If the Communists get the prestige and material aid they need without having to change any of their own policies, the seeds of future conflict will be continually nourished, ready to sprout anew with little or no warning." Novak promptly filed a column under his and his partner Rowland Evans's byline to run May 2: "A determined eight-hour sleeper with regular daytime rest periods as governor"—a rarity among politicians, who are generally a manic lot—"Reagan steadily lost sleep thought interminable days of speaking and handshaking, aggravated by slow, small private planes.... Most startling to longtime Reagan watchers, he did not even complain.... Having convinced himself Mr. Ford is not up to the presidency, Reagan must also convince himself he could stand a frantic national campaign."

His aides lined up a national campaign organization, while the candidate who said he was running for nothing stockpiled income and national attention. They devised a strategy: primaries, not party caucuses—an outside game. And they devised an outsider's rhetorical stance—but not *too much* of an outsider's stance, lest anyone powerful become personally offended. It would be a run, not against Gerald Ford or even Congress or Democrats, but something grander, a post-Watergate crusade against "the 'buddy system' in Washington."

Writers visited his office in Los Angeles that summer; it featured a desk he brought over from the governor's mansion and was crowded with toy elephants and political mementoes, such as a slab of concrete with a pair of shoes embedded therein (a gift from newsmen reminding him of the time he had said "my feet are in concrete" on the subject of state income tax withholding, and then had reversed himself). Family snapshots, pictures of Ronald Reagan with Dwight D. Eisenhower in golf togs, Ronald Reagan with the pope, Ronald Reagan with Billy Graham, lined the walls—but not, as one columnist noticed, any of Ronald Reagan with Richard Nixon or Gerald Ford. Books, too, including one sitting out on the desk: Lawrence Welk's autobiography, *Ah-One! Ah-Two!*

(A Reagan flack assured the columnist who recorded this "that the books in the room did not necessarily reflect Reagan's reading tastes, that he was sent dozens of volumes by admirers.")

All evidence suggested an organization gearing up for a serious and sustained national campaign. And yet, as late as September, a memo crossed President Ford's desk arguing that the governor was not going to run. The White House simply refused to gear up for a serious fight. Richard Nixon had just told Ford's advisor Jerry Jones that Reagan was a "lightweight." Internal political memorandums referred to the grassroots organization Reagan's people were carefully cultivating around the country as "right-wing nuts."

In October, Reagan disappeared from the radio. In his place were greatest-hits reruns. (One was "The Superintendent's Dilemma," an allegory in verse about a forlorn educator rendered superfluous by power-mad bureaucrats. Another poem was "The Incredible Bread Machine," a libertarian loaves-and-fishes miracle tale of a man who invents a cheaper way to manufacture bread, becomes wealthy by ending world hunger, then is punished out of existence by a vindictive state; later in the year it was made into a movie with an introduction by treasury secretary Simon.) Julie Nixon substituted as host one week. (She promoted "National Employ the Handicapped Week" and excoriated college students supposedly flocking onto the welfare rolls.) And on November 17 Reagan was on the covers of *Newsweek* ("Can He Stop Ford?") and *Time* ("The Star Shakes Up the Party"). In *Time*'s article, a "former close adviser" was quoted: "I never ever saw him initiate an order on his own.... That's what made Reagan so easy for us to program.... If he becomes President, it is a terribly important question—who's running the country?"

Then, the big day arrived.

HE DID NOT HAVE HIS FAMILY BY HIS SIDE. THAT WAS A POLITICAL DECIsion. Adult children—his adopted son, Michael, just married the previous week, was thirty-two; daughter Maureen was thirty-four; Patti was twenty-three; Ron was seventeen—would only point up that in February, Ronald Reagan would be eligible for Social Security. The presence of Maureen and Michael—identified, invariably, as "the adopted son and the daughter of Ronald Reagan and Jane Wyman"—would remind voters that he would be the first president who had been divorced. Reagan was supposed to be the embodiment of wholesome family values; the Fords were supposed to be the embodiment of 1970s moral dissolution. Best not to complicate things.

Jack Ford, twenty-three, had just admitted publicly that he had smoked marijuana, and his brother Steve, nineteen, who had just changed his major from range science to animal science at the University of Utah, told reporters, "Right now, I'm against legalizing marijuana, although sometimes I'm for it and sometimes I'm against it." It made for a contrast to Patti Davis—she changed her name to her mother's in college so as to avoid any association with her father, then dropped out—who smoked marijuana, too. In fact the vociferously antidrug governor's daughter did rather more than that: when she had asked her parents to pay for psychotherapy, they refused, so she starting buying the stuff by the pound and selling it to pay for the treatment herself. She certainly never publicly talked about drugs, however. "I had been taught to keep secrets, to keep our image intact for the world," she wrote in a memoir. "Under our family's definition of 'loyalty,' the public should never see that under a carefully preserved surface was a group of people who knew how to inflict wounds, and then convincingly say those wounds never existed."

Maureen Reagan described the lesson of her upbringing as "Be nice to people, but don't tell them anything, because your parents make good copy." However, like her mother, Jane Wyman, who displayed her marriage's dirty laundry in newspapers, she honored the principle in the breach. Nine days before her father's candidacy was announced she told reporters, "I am the most vociferous of all his detractors in our family regarding his candidacy. It is for reasons all personal and very selfish. They come after eight years of having to make phone calls to arrange appointments to speak to my own father." Compare the Fords. As son Steve explained to reporters: "Everyone in our family is grown up. We're not under our folks' care anymore." They did what they wanted, unashamed to tell the world, and with their parents' implicit blessing, too. It was hard to imagine them having to make an appointment to speak to Dad.

Contrast that to the family of the family-values candidate: four kids, seven marriages, zero college degrees, several expulsions from boarding school, two contemplated suicide attempts. Once, Patti had been studying at Northwestern when her father intervened to have a black man arrested with whom she liked to share friendly banter. She was so humiliated she considered suicide—she "touched the blade to my wrist and felt how easy it would be." After she transferred to USC, her young brother showed up once on her doorstep, a sixteen-year-old runaway, sick of his mother hassling him to cut his hair and spying on him using the house's intercoms (she used them as a dedicated surveillance system: better living, electrically). The last straw had been when she searched his room (she found, naturally, a bag of marijuana). Patti soon returned him back home. She feared her mother was about to report her to the authorities for kidnapping. Once, her father asked an acquaintance, referring to this daughter of his, "Do you think a child can be born evil?"

Their memoirs are filled with images of abandonment, distance, cruelty, dispossession, silence. "I spent so much time alone during my early high school years," wrote Maureen of the prep schools she shuttled between, one all the way across the country, "that I began to wonder if I would ever fit in anywhere." Michael, adopted by Jane Wyman and Ronald Reagan in 1945, was sexually abused by a camp counselor when he was seven and lived every day in fear that the nude photos his victimizer took would surface, or that the world would learn that he was a "bastard." He was afraid to tell his parents about it. Patti put forward outright horror stories. Her mother would scream at her in public as passersby stared, and one time locked her in a sweltering car. She beat Patti almost daily, and her father refused to believe it—though Patti said once there had been a witness: Holmes Tuttle, his political benefactor, whose only response, after pulling Nancy off her daughter, was to have said, "Don't ever do that in front of me again." Nancy also popped pills, blaming Patti, whose physician grandfather once handed her a thick manila folder. "This is a medical report on your mother," he said. "Her condition is very serious. Emotions can kill someone, you know. And if you don't start behaving, we could lose her."

When her half brother Michael was fourteen and she was seven, he came to live, on weekends when he wasn't in boarding school, in their

Pacific Palisades house, so perfect and pristine that Patti feared to play in it. He had to sleep on the couch. He was thrilled when construction finally began, more than a year later, on a new room—"the symbol of my acceptance in the family," he thought, until he learned it was for little Ron's live-in nurse instead, and he was to sleep on the nurse's old daybed in the playroom.

It was around then, in 1960, after dropping out of college, that Maureen began living with a married police officer twelve years her senior. (Her father confirmed this when he asked the FBI, as a favor, to investigate.) In 1961 she married the cop, who beat her; in 1962, they divorced. The next year, at Michael's high school graduation the commencement speaker was his father. Afterward Reagan made the rounds of students for introductions. He stopped before one, stuck out his hand: "My name is Ronald Reagan. What's yours?" His son, anxious every day of his life about whether his adoptive father truly accepted him, took off his mortarboard and responded, "Remember me? I'm your son Mike."

That happened with all his children, all the time: "I frequently had to remind him that I was his child," Patti wrote. "[I]t seemed sometimes to slip his mind. Often I'd come into a room and he'd look up from his notecards as though he wasn't sure who I was. Ron would race up to him, small and brimming with a child's enthusiasm, and I'd see the same bewildered look in my father's eyes." It confused her when, shortly after her twelfth birthday, she saw his famous 1964 address for Barry Goldwater on TV, the one in which he intoned: "We must preserve for our children this, the last best hope on earth, or we'll sentence them to take the last step into a thousand years of darkness." She thought, *What about his children?*

Michael matriculated at Arizona State University, where he raised hell with a kid named Joe Bonanno Jr., son of the capo of the Bonanno crime family, on whom an FBI investigation was closing in. (At that, J. Edgar Hoover did another favor for Reagan, who was about to begin running for governor—Hoover hoped to enlist Governor Reagan's aid in firing system president Clark Kerr. The FBI informed Reagan about his son's association, even though that may have compromised the investigation of Joe Bonanno Sr.) Michael flunked out, began working as a fry cook, was fired, worked on the docks in Los Angeles, became a professional motorboat racer, got married—then his pregnant wife left him, and a district attorney told him he would be sent to jail unless he agreed to grant her a divorce and pay back child support. Patti, meanwhile, opened up to her father about how her mother had constantly beaten her when she was a child. "What the hell is it with you?" Patti remembers him responding. "Why do you make these things up about your mother? She is the most loving, caring person in the world, and you've caused her nothing but unhappiness."

She met a member of the rock band the Eagles, made love with him that very day in the open air, and told her mother she would be traveling with the band to Europe. The mother about whom so many sordid rumors once circulated snapped, "Well, you're going to have a separate hotel room, aren't you?"

Not likely. Soon Patti moved into the rock star's house, and her father, who used to wake up in bungalows at the Garden of Allah not knowing the name of the girl sleeping next to him, roared into the phone, "This is just immoral, what you're doing. Living together without the benefit of marriage is a sin in the eyes of God. He tells us this in the Bible." (He didn't, the insolent daughter insisted. "The disciples wrote the Bible." "No, they didn't. God wrote it." She thought this "the most aggravating aspect of discussing anything with my father. He has this ability to make statements that are so far outside the parameters of logic that they leave you speechless.") They stopped speaking, though she did receive a letter that November: "I'm sorry you didn't choose to come to the family meeting the other night when I told everyone I'd decided to run for President." But she had never been informed of the meeting.

In her memoir she remembered her parents' odd behavior when John F. Kennedy died and tearful parents came to pick up tearful children from school: "I wished desperately for my mother's face to soften, to crumble—to share in the anguish that was all around us. When the car doors closed around us and the sound of my crying was magnified by the small space we now shared, she turned to me and said, 'All right, Patti. I think that's enough now.'" That night, November 22, 1963, a dinner party with the Robert Taylors, Alfred Bloomingdales, and Holmes Tuttles went on as planned, convivially. The event apparently made so little impression on the future president that his candidacy announcement had originally been planned for November 22, 1975—until his savvy press secretary, Lyn Nofziger, pointed out that this was the anniversary of Kennedy's assassination. So they made it two days earlier instead.

ON THE AFTERNOON OF NOVEMBER 19, RONALD REAGAN CALLED THE White House.

"Well, Mr. President," he said, "I am going to make an announcement and I want to tell you about it ahead of time. I am going to run for President. I trust we can have a good contest, and I hope it won't be divisive."

"I'm sorry you're getting into this. I believe I've done a good job, and that I can be elected. Regardless of your good intentions, your bid is bound to be divisive."

"I don't think it will harm the party."

"Well, I think it will," the President of the United States responded—and hung up.

The night of November 19, Reagan took questions from an audience of one thousand New Hampshirites for almost an hour. He was asked about Charles Percy's remark that he suffered from "simplistic thinking," that a "Reagan nomination and the crushing defeat likely to follow could signal the beginning of the end of our party as an effective force in American political life," that he was "far out of the centrist stream," and that if the president "wins the nomination by out-Reaganing Reagan, it will cost him the election." Reagan answered, "You know, sometimes I think moderation should be taken in moderation." That had the audience in stitches. Seventy-five percent of its members lined up for almost an hour to shake his hand. Jules Witcover saw him "taking not only the person's hand in his, but his or her eyes with his own, holding the contact until the other person's glance fell away." He wrote, "Anyone who saw him at the Sheraton-Wayfarer Hotel in Bedford, New Hampshire, that night had to be convinced that Jerry Ford was going to have his hands full with Reagan."

The next morning, you could flip open your *New York Times* and read in Scotty Reston's column, "The astonishing thing is that this amusing but frivolous Reagan fantasy is taken so seriously by the news media and particularly by the President. It makes a lot of news, but it doesn't make much sense."

THE "AMUSING BUT FRIVOLOUS FANTASY" BEGAN WITH A SPEECH, though one female admirer's fantasy began before that, when she intercepted the candidate on the way to the podium for a quick encounter. "If only everybody could meet him one-on-one and see those incredibly blue eyes," she reported. "No wonder he didn't like to wear his glasses."

It was 9:30 A.M., at the National Press Club on Fourteenth and F, three blocks from the White House; he wore a purple plaid suit his staff abhorred and a pinstripe shirt and polka-dot tie and a folded white silk puffing up extravagantly out of his pocket—this had become his trademark back when he introduced *General Electric Theater* on TV. "I have called this press conference to announce that I am a candidate for the presidency and to ask for the support of all Americans who share my belief that our nation needs to embark on a new, constructive course," he said. Perhaps with the previous night's conversation with the president in mind, he added, "I believe my candidacy will be healthy for my nation and the party."

He didn't refer to his opponent. That, the news reports would conveniently mention, honored his "11th Commandment"—*Thou shalt not speak ill of another Republican*—coined by the chairman of the GOP in California in 1966, and loudly taken up by Reagan during his gubernatorial primary run that year against the liberal former mayor of San Francisco. It had been one of the most enduringly effective snow jobs in the history of electoral politics: the party chairman, an obstetrician from Orange County named Gaylord Parkinson, was simultaneously on the payroll of the Reagan campaign, which had arrived at the strategic calculation that a campaign focused on personalities would disadvantage Reagan.

All three networks went live. Reagan took the high road of policy: "In just a few years, three vital measures of economic decay—unemployment, inflation, and interest rates—have more than doubled, at times reaching ten percent and even more. Government at all levels now absorbs more than forty-four percent of our personal income. It has become more intrusive, more meddlesome, and less effective."

Gerald Ford had been saying precisely the same things in *his* speeches—he had, after all, precisely six weeks earlier, flayed "the enormous growth of government" that was draining away America's "vitality and prosperity" and that bore the label "Made in Washington." But, well, there was an inconvenient fact: Ford had *lived* in Washington, D.C., since 1948, when he was elected to the first of his thirteen terms in Congress, making friends, making deals, making himself, Reagan now thundered like Professor Harold Hill, *part of the problem*, "right here in Washington, D.C. Our nation's capital has become the seat of a buddy system that functions for its own benefit—increasingly insensitive to the needs of the American worker, who supports it with his taxes. Today, it is difficult to find leaders who are independent of the forces that have brought us our problems—the Congress, the bureaucracy, the lobbyists, big business and big labor. . . .

"I don't believe for one moment that four more years of business as usual in Washington is the answer to our problems, and I don't believe the American people believe it, either."

Then there was foreign policy. A week earlier the president had received a memo from his pollster Robert Teeter: "'Détente' is a particularly unpopular idea with most Republican primary voters. . . . We ought to stop using the word whenever possible." The president decided to oblige him—too late to keep Ronald Reagan from rubbing the dread seven letters in his face nonetheless: "A decade ago we had military superiority. Today we are in danger of being surpassed by a nation that has never made any effort to hide its hostility to everything we stand for. Through détente we have sought peace with our adversaries. We should continue to do so but must make it plain that we expect a stronger indication that they also seek a lasting peace with us."

He concluded with a sparkle in his eye. "We, as a people, aren't happy if we are not moving forward," he said. "We must offer progress instead of stagnation, truth instead of promises, hope and faith instead of defeatism and despair. Then, I am sure, the people will make those decisions which will restore confidence in our way of life and release that energy that *is* the American people."

Then he took reporters' questions. He was asked about the FBI's investigation of Martin Luther King, reported in that morning's papers. He said he had not read the morning papers.

GERALD FORD MUST HAVE BEEN BEREFT. HE HAD GIVEN ALL HIS ADULT life to his party. Loyalty—"unbending, undying, unthinking loyalty to the Republican Party," Richard Reeves labeled it—had been his calling card: voting with President Nixon at the second-highest rate of all members of Congress; announcing, after a select, secret briefing on Nixon's secret bombing of Cambodia, that Nixon had not been "false or deceptive" in claiming he'd never violated that country's neutrality; helping scotch Wright Patman's Watergate inquiry in the House. "Team player" was his highest term of praise. And now, here was his reward: another member of his team was charging into battle against him. Punishing him for doing what he'd been called against his inclination (he had hoped, in 1974, to retire) to do: *govern*.

Screw the eleventh commandment. Came a statement from his campaign organization, the "President Ford Committee": "Despite how well Ronald Reagan does or does not do in the early primaries, the simple political fact is that he cannot defeat any candidate the Democrats put up. Reagan's constituency is much too narrow, even within the Republican Party. . . . While not unmindful of his ability, he does not have the critical national and international experience that President Ford has gained through 25 years of public service. . . . We want a united party going into the General Election. Any motion against unity is counterproductive and damaging to our prospects next November."

In the West Wing the chatter was about how Reagan had embarrassed himself. Ron Nessen's memo on the press coverage cited stuff like, "The trouble with Reagan, of course, is that his positions on the major issues are cunningly phrased nonsense" (the liberal *Chicago Daily News*); and "The Reagan challenge to Mr. Ford comes from the right, the radical right, which cherishes notions that often are too simple, too negative, and too risky . . . if Mr. Ford falters or swings too far right, we would welcome the candidacies of others speaking for the Republican mainstream" (the *Baltimore Sun*); and "His image is largely that of the role-playing actor . . . ill-equipped for the real world beyond the footlights" (from conservative columnist James J. Kilpatrick, who misspelled "Regan's" name). A staffer who actually attended the Press Club, however—Ford's close personal aide Jerry Jones—concluded that "we are in for a real battle." He thought Reagan "had his answers down pat" and "handled the questioners with a sense of candor, humor, and calm." Ford's savvy young director of communications, David Gergen, was pretty impressed with him, too.

REAGAN HIT THE ROAD. THE METHOD DEVISED BY THE PROS IN THE CAMpaign organization—christened "Citizens for Reagan," a name drawn from Reagan's 1966 campaign theme of running as a "citizen politician"—aped Nixon's in 1968: a very small number of events, timed for maximal exposure on each night's evening news, the applause lines in each speech carefully indicated in text handouts dispensed to reporters each morning. A striking number of his campaign staff bore the Watergate taint: Lyn Nofziger, his longtime Sacramento press aide, who'd been responsible for the Nixon White House's project to harass the Long Island paper *Newsday* after it ran an investigation of Nixon's buddy Bebe Rebozo; Roger Stone, CREEP national youth director, who'd posted a fake check to the *Manchester Union Leader* to try to frame a rival of Nixon's in 1972 for ties to revolutionary socialists; Kenneth Reitz, who in 1973 lost his job supervising congressional campaigns for the Republican National Committee when it was discovered he'd helped spy on Edmund Muskie for the Committee to Re-elect the President, and was now Reagan's coordinator for the California primary. But no one seemed to notice.

The first stop was Miami. The site was a Ramada Inn, near the airport (a Nixon campaign trick: that way the national TV reporters could ship their tape to New York in time for the evenings newscasts), in a ballroom not unlike the one in which Bobby Kennedy was speaking seven years earlier just before he was shot.

He began with a question: “If the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for battle?” Then he quoted Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who, he said, after embarking “on a course that made bold use of the government to ease the pain of those times,” was “soon moved to sound a warning”: “*We have built new instruments of public power in the hands of the people’s government . . . but in the hands of political puppets of an economic aristocracy, such power would provide shackles for the liberties of our people.*” Reagan said, “Unfortunately, that warning went unheeded. Today, there is an economic aristocracy, born of government’s growing interference in our lives.” A rather brazen interpretation, given that the speech he quoted, FDR’s annual message to Congress in January 1936, had actually been referring to “financial and industrial groups” who in their “domination of government” and “entrenched greed” do “not want to return to that individualism of which they prate” but seek only “power for themselves, enslavement for the public.”

The press, though, wouldn’t have much time to reflect on the contradictions. Reagan finished his speech and began shaking hands—and a twenty-year-old man pulled out what turned out to be a toy .45-caliber pistol and was wrestled to the ground by three Secret Service agents. He had already threatened the lives of the president, vice president, and Governor Reagan on the demand that “Squeaky” Fromme be freed.

Reagan did not appear shaken. He never stopped smiling as he was led away. The Secret Service’s local special agent in charge, citing the already enormous Democratic presidential field—it included Indiana senator Birch Bayh, Texas senator Lloyd Bentsen, former Georgia governor Jimmy Carter, Oklahoma senator Fred Harris, North Carolina governor Terry Sanford, former Peace Corps director Sargent Shriver, Arizona congressman Morris Udall, Pennsylvania governor Milton Shapp, George Wallace, “and more candidates on the way”—predicted it “would only get worse.” It was almost now a rite of passage. “[I]f he didn’t feel like a candidate before,” a Reagan aide told CBS, “he does now.”

On each day’s schedule was an extended press conference. At the one in Miami, he was asked how the incident would affect his support for gun rights. He had entered that debate aggressively on the radio the previous summer. Barely four years earlier there had been all but a consensus that cheap handguns—“Saturday night specials”—had to be removed from city streets; when a bill was introduced in Congress in 1971 to ban them, the National Rifle Association announced, “We are for it 100 percent.” The 1972 Republican platform promised to “intensify efforts to prevent criminal access to all weapons, including special emphasis on cheap, readily-obtainable handguns.” But since then a civil war had broken out within both the NRA and the Republican Party. One faction within the NRA, formerly an anodyne organization for sportsmen, saw any attempt to restrict any gun as an expression of the Communist line; its adherents mailed glowing reports of vigilante heroics to the NRA magazine *American Rifleman* for its “Armed Citizen” column. The other faction, which controlled the national office in Washington, published a *Fact Book on Firearms Control* endorsing such “reasonable regulation” as “a waiting period between purchases and delivery,” strict record keeping for manufacturers and retailers, controls on “all machine guns,” and limits placed upon those “wishing to carry a concealed firearm.” But it was the former group that took control of the NRA’s new lobbying arm, the Institute for Legal Action. Its lobbyist, a fearsome former border control agent named Harlon Carter, called “the so-called Saturday night specials . . . a girl’s best friend. They’re small enough to fit into a woman’s purse or be at her bedside at home.” He boasted of killing the very anti–Saturday night special bill the NRA had been instrumental in introducing—and announced that henceforth, the organization would oppose any law aimed at “inanimate objects instead of the evildoer.”

That was Ronald Reagan’s sort of language. In 1967 he had signed one of the nation’s strongest gun control laws, after armed Black Panthers stormed into the California legislature on a lobbying mission of their own. But in June 1975, as Gallup reported 67 percent of Americans favored “the registration of all firearms,” Ford’s attorney general, Edward Levi, proposed a new law tightening access to guns in high-crime urban areas, Reagan thundered on the radio: “Now that’s funny. It seems to me that the best way to deter murderers and thieves is to arm law-abiding folk and not to disarm them. . . . As news story after news story shows, if the victim is armed, he has a chance—a better chance by far than if he isn’t armed. Nobody knows in fact how many crimes are *not* committed because criminals know a certain store owner has a gun—and will use it.” He said the attorney general “should encourage homeowners and business people to purchase them and use them properly. . . . After all, guns don’t make criminals. It’s criminals who make use of guns. They’re the ones who should be punished—not the law-abiding citizen who seeks to defend himself.”

So had he now changed his mind? Not at all, he replied in Miami: it “would be naive and foolish to simply disarm the citizen.” Reagan was not trimming his sails to win support. That was one reason he inspired so much support.

That, and his passionately creative visions of innocence. As at his next stop, in North Carolina, which held a crucial primary on March 23.

In this Southern state he chose to launch into a homily on racial reconciliation: "When the first bombs were dropped on Pearl Harbor there was great segregation in the military forces," he explained. "In World War II, this was corrected." This was news to the more historically minded reporters, who knew the armed forces had integrated only under an executive order from Harry Truman, in 1948, three years after the war ended—and that segregation ended in the rest of society only after concerted protest and civil disobedience. In the press conference that followed he was asked whether he had approved of Martin Luther King's civil disobedience tactics.

No, he responded: "There can never be any justification for breaking the law."

Someone followed up: then how could blacks have ever gained their civil rights in places like North Carolina?

That pressed a button, activating a core component of the man's amour propre: "I am just incapable of prejudice," as he had said in 1966 during his debut on *Meet the Press,* and many times since. Raised by a Protestant mother who married his Catholic father in an anti-Catholic age; having played side by side with black boys; having been raised in a church that preached racial brotherhood, his mother having taken in released prisoners, black and white, to convalesce in the family sewing room—how could he be racist? He just disliked civil rights laws. He'd said the 1964 act outlawing discrimination in public accommodations was "a bad piece of legislation," an unwarranted intrusion of federal power into the lives of individuals.

He had many stories about his racial enlightenment. There was the time he wanted to see *The Birth of a Nation,* D. W. Griffith's pro-Ku Klux Klan blockbuster. "My brother and I were the only kids not to see it," he would say, reciting his father's words: "The Klan's the Klan, and a sheet's a sheet, and any man who wears one over his head is a bum. And I want no more words on the subject." And the time his father was working as a traveling salesman and the desk clerk at the only hotel in a small town proudly informed him that the place didn't serve Jews; Jack announced they wouldn't be serving this Catholic, either, and slept a winter's night in his car. There was the time when a visiting team could find no hotel to stay in, for the team had two black players, who were welcomed into the Reagan home instead. It was precisely such magnanimous gestures on the part of individual whites that could solve any lingering racial problem; and, since Americans were magnanimous, it *would* solve the problem.

"There must be no lack of equal opportunity, no inequality before the law," he said in the televised opening speech of his 1966 gubernatorial campaign. But: "There is a limit to what can be accomplished by laws and regulations, and I seriously question whether anything additional is needed in that line." That year, in Washington, a new civil rights law banning housing discrimination was being debated; in Chicago, marching through the city's white bungalow belt in favor of the principle, Martin Luther King was jeered by swastika-wielding protesters, and knives and rocks were thrown at his head. That did not change his mind. The next year Reagan, returning to his alma mater to dedicate a new library, asked Eureka students rhetorically, "Are the problems of the urban ghetto the result of selfishness on our part, of indifference to suffering?" The answer to him seemed plain: "No people in all the history of mankind have shaped so wisely its material circumstances." Speaking again at Eureka in 1973 he marveled at those who claimed America was still marred by racism: hadn't Los Angeles just elected a Negro mayor? In 1968, when a black questioner asked him why she never saw blacks at Republican events, he politely but forcefully replied that it wasn't Republicans who were racist but the supposedly liberal Democrats, "a party that had betrayed them. . . . The Negro has delivered himself to those who have no other intention than to create a Federal plantation and ignore him." The *Washington Post* reported, "Reagan handled the situation so smoothly that some of the newsmen aboard his chartered 727 suggested, half-seriously, that the Reagan organization had set up the incident." It was part of his liturgy of absolution.

He had not always handled such questions so smoothly. He almost never lost his temper in public. He did once, however, during his 1966 gubernatorial primary campaign. A delegate at the National Negro Republican Assembly in Santa Monica said, "It grieves me when a leading Republican candidate says the Civil Rights Act is a bad piece of legislation." Reagan then shocked the assembly by slamming down his note cards and shouting, "I resent the implication that there is any bigotry in my nature. Don't anyone ever imply I lack integrity. I will not stand silent and let anyone imply that—in this or any other group." He slammed his fist into his palm, muttered something, and walked out of the room.

He knew better than to blow up again. Now he just told the stories. In Charlotte on the second day of his presidential campaign the story he told was about "where I think the first change began. . . . I have often stated publicly that the great tragedy was then that we didn't even know that we had a racial problem. It wasn't even recognized. But our generation, and I take great pride in this, were the ones who first of all recognized and then began doing something about it."

Reportorial ears pricked up: *this* was going to be something.

"I have called attention to the fact that when I was a sports announcer, broadcasting major-league baseball, most Americans had forgotten that at the time the opening lines of the official baseball guide read, 'Baseball is a game for Caucasian gentlemen,' and in organized baseball no one but Caucasians were allowed. Well, there were many of us when I was broadcasting, sportswriters, sportscasters, myself included, [who] began editorializing about what a ridiculous thing this was and why it should be changed. And one day it was changed."

And indeed, he *had* called attention to that, in 1967, in a televised debate with Robert Kennedy, when he told the same story about baseball. In the interim, if anyone had bothered to point out to him that there was no line in the official baseball guide asserting that "baseball is a game for Caucasian gentlemen," or had pointed out to him that he stopped broadcasting baseball in 1937 and the sport wasn't integrated until 1947, the intervention clearly didn't take. He was still telling the story in the White House nine years later.

The next question was a routine one—and so was his answer. Someone asked what he thought about Senator Percy's claim that Reagan's lack of moderation would tank the Republican Party. A non sequitur quip followed: "If you're lying on the operating table and the man is standing there with a scalpel in his hand"—*smile*—"I'd like to know he has more than a moderately successful record." That introduced a list of statistics: that he'd hired more minorities than any previous governor; reduced the population of mental hospitals from 26,500 to 7,000 "by adequately funding county mental health clinics"; cut welfare rolls by 400,000 while "boosting aid to the genuinely needy." Punch line: "Maybe Senator Percy will tell me what is immoderate about those things that we did."

Then he was off to raise the roof at his next campaign speech.

On the plane back to Los Angeles he acknowledged what had become by then a cliché: "There's no question Goldwater tried to tell us some things that maybe eleven years ago we weren't ready to hear. We still were wrapped in the New Deal syndrome of believing that government could do all of these things for us. I insist Barry Goldwater never was defeated on the basis of his philosophy. The opposition, aided and abetted by Republican opponents in the primaries—which makes me so strong in my Eleventh Commandment belief—created a straw man, and what the people really voted against was a false image of a dangerous radical."

The *New York Times* disagreed, but then, it would. Columnist William Shannon, surveying Pat Buchanan's new book, *Conservative Votes, Liberal Victories* (published, as it happened, by Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Company), that Sunday in the book review section, said George Wallace's primary victories "may have been only protest votes of transient import. . . . Senator Goldwater, after all, was crushed at the polls when he presented the Conservative message straightforwardly."

RONALD REAGAN WAS NOT SENATOR GOLDWATER—A HYPOTHESIS, AS IT happened, that one now could scrutinize scientifically.

The Federal Communications Commission had ruled that showing Reagan's movies on TV triggered the equal-time provision—the Ford campaign would get an equivalent amount of free screen time for balance. It happened just as the new Federal Election Commission ruled that the RNC could pay for Gerald Ford's travels, but not Ronald Reagan's: advantage Ford. Chevy Chase had a bonanza that weekend. First he parodied Ford's reversal on a New York City bailout. (Chase mocked Ford: "Let me be clear. . . . As President, I will change my mind whenever I want." Then he answered a glass of water instead of the red phone.) Chase next aimed at the Church Committee's report on the assassination of foreign leaders. ("Commented Ford upon reading the report, quote, 'Boy, I'm sure glad I'm not foreign.'") Then, on the FCC decision, a groaner about how the wheelchair-bound George Wallace would get to show a minute of *Ironsides* for each minute of a Ronald Reagan flick. But Reagan's line on the subject was funnier than Chevy Chase. "Somebody must have goofed," he said, "because I've made some movies that, if they put them on television, *I'd* demand equal time."

Another outcome of the equal-time rule was that Barry Goldwater filled in for Reagan on his radio show. He said the same sorts of things Reagan did—ponderously, technically, and charmlessly.

On the campaign plane, Jules Witcover asked Reagan point-blank how he could possibly succeed when his positions on things like Social Security were the same ones that caused the 1964 nominee to be cut down at the knees. Reagan returned, "The funny thing is in the speech I made about him which was so well-received, I said some of the same things." He then described, with a refreshingly rare frankness, how he accomplished this—how his rhetoric succeeded where Goldwater's did not.

"I've always believed that you say the qualifier first. If you say, 'Now, let's make it plain: the first priority must be that no one who is depending on that for their non-earning years should have it taken away from him, or have it endangered. It is endangered today by the shape that it is in.' So you then can go on and say, 'Now, the program is out of balance. Down the line someplace, can come a very great tragedy of finding the cupboard is bare. Before that happens, let's fix Social Security.'"

Or, on the subject of welfare: "'Now, I am not suggesting that we stop welfare tomorrow. *So, having qualified with that*, let me say, I just have faith in the American people that, if through some set of circumstances welfare disappeared tomorrow, no one would miss a meal. The people in this country, in every community all over, would get together and form emergency committees, and take up the slack. Those are the kind of people they are.'"

Maybe they were. Maybe they weren't. Be that as it may, Americans seemed to like to hear it. In a Gallup poll taken the day his first tour ended, Reagan had gone from trailing Gerald Ford by 23 points among Republicans to a 40 to 32 percent lead, an unprecedented one-month jump. Independent voters said they preferred the former actor over the president by 27 percent to 25. "Ronald Reagan more popular than the President? Has the Gallup Poll gone bananas?" the *Pittsburgh News'* political columnist wondered. "Are the Republicans once again prepared to self-destruct by nominating another Barry Goldwater?... And have those 11,324 Democratic presidential candidates trained their sights on the wrong man?"

CIVILIZATION CONTINUED ITS COLLAPSE.

Tom Wicker complained that "no one in Congress or the executive branch has even begun to face" the philosophical and institutional consequences of the Church Committee's and Pike Committee's revelations. Pike tried to cite Henry Kissinger for contempt of Congress and was blocked at every turn. A citation, he complained in an open letter to colleagues, would not "cause the earth to tremble nor the sun to stop in its tracks. No one is seeking to place Mr. Kissinger in jail, and the worst that can happen to him is that he might have to provide the documents subpoenaed to Congress"—and if that be "McCarthyism," "then the State Department has arrogated unto itself total non-accountability." His conservative Democratic colleague George Mahon of Texas promptly posted a letter of apology to the White House "for the continual confrontation between Congress and the executive branch" that was "tearing our country apart."

Meg Greenfield in *Newsweek* wondered why, even as the Church Committee's assassination report if anything exceeded all fears, "the bomb proved something of a dud." She decided it was "the anesthetizing effect of years of revelation and shock.... Washington, by virtue of a seemingly unending flow of such disclosures in the past couple of years, has managed to perform a... nationwide lobotomy of the public." On December 8, the *Times'* editorialists all but absolved the preceding president of Watergate: "By the time Richard Nixon became President, the practiced seaminess had become so entrenched that the deception of Watergate flowed with alarming naturalness." Meanwhile, on the other side of the op-ed page, William Safire, in a column headlined "Orchestrating Outrage," concluded, "History will show the Nixon Administration not as the one that invented abuse of power, but the one that gloriously if unwittingly served the cause of individual liberty by the clumsy way it tried to continue the abuses of Kennedy and Johnson."

Like clockwork a new outrage emerged to be ignored. Back at the end of April, as Saigon fell, NBC's David Brinkley had editorialized in his stern grandfatherly way that "now, for the first time since Hitler invaded Poland, there is no war anywhere in the world.... Since Hitler it has become a major industry, with huge amounts of the people's money being spent to pay for wars already fought, paying either in money or inflation or both, and spent on hiring armies and buying hardware for some war that may come, or be contrived. Numerous national leaders, including some of ours, have turned to the military in times of stress in the hopes of quick and spectacular solutions. Well, now, after several spectacular failures, people might hope their politicians will be less quick to reach for their guns." Not so fast, Mr. Brinkley: hardly eight months later the CIA director confirmed that the agency was aiding one of three sides in a complex civil war in the oil-rich African nation of Angola.

The political context was fraught. The previous summer, Congress voted to withdraw arms aid to Turkey, following its invasion of Cyprus, the first real test of the War Powers Act of 1974 forbidding military action without congressional authorization. Simultaneously, a "Carnation Revolution" broke out in Portugal, overthrowing the fascist Portuguese dictatorship (it began with a bloodless coup by military officers and ended in a popular uprising in which grateful citizens stuck carnations into the barrels of government soldiers' guns; Reagan called it the work of "leftist street hoodlums"). Portugal promptly divested itself of its colonies, including Angola, where, that December, Soviet-backed guerrillas were on the verge of seizing power. That was the final straw, for the American right, against Gerald Ford and his timorous doctrine of détente. William Rusher's column predicted the arrival of thousands of Soviet-equipped Cubans, "spearheading and stiffening a drive by local Communist forces to take over all of Angola. . . . If they succeed, Communism will have reached the eastern shore of the Atlantic on a front nearly a thousand miles long." He concluded, "That rumble you hear isn't dominoes falling. It's the roof caving in." James J. Kilpatrick wrote that a land "almost as large as Britain, France, and Spain combined" would be within a month "for all practical purposes . . . a virtual satellite of the Soviet Union." He concluded, "It might have been possible for the Central Intelligence Agency to avert this calamity—but the CIA has been crippled by a moralizing Senate."

Not so crippled, it turned out. The CIA was already funneling arms and advice to a faction called UNITA, whose cynical and ideologically flexible leader, Jonas Savimbi, had only recently called himself a Maoist, but now declared himself an acolyte of American-style capitalism. Outgoing CIA director Colby defended the decision before the House Intelligence Committee: "If you see the Soviet Union deliberately trying to expand its power, is it more prudent for the United States to take some modest action or do nothing?" He also reminded the committee that this was legal because paramilitary operations were eliminated from the War Powers Act. Senator Dick Clark, a liberal Democrat from Iowa, pointed out that such "modest" CIA action was exactly how the Vietnam debacle began. And the Church Committee had just released its final report on U.S actions in Chile, concluding, "Eight million dollars was spent, covertly, in the three years between 1970 and the military coup in September 1973, with over three million dollars expended in fiscal 1972 alone." Clark introduced legislation to cut off military aid and covert action in Angola. His colleague Clifford Case of New Jersey, the ranking Republican on the Foreign Relations Committee, complained, "I don't think we can just *pull out* of Angola"—which is what the Foreign Relations Committee had said about Vietnam, too.

Anthony Lewis advanced the theory, marveling at his own cynicism, that the leak of CIA involvement had come straight from the top—that the Oval Office hoped Congress would react by cutting off aid, allowing the administration to ask the red-baiting question "Who lost Angola?" in an election year. He pointed out that government officials had been

admitting "it made no difference to us which nationalist faction won the internal struggle" ("What the hell is Angola?" asked one senator), and yet we intervened in favor of one faction. "What the world sees as self-inflicted wounds may look to the authors like a way of electing Gerald Ford and keeping Henry Kissinger in office," he wrote, by running against "a Democratic Congress that he can imply is soft on Communism, loose with secrets, and ready to retreat from American greatness. That line is especially useful for competing with Ronald Reagan."

Why not? Ford was once more ensnared in the embarrassments of governance, and, politically, at the worst possible time. He returned from a state visit to China, which could not endear him to conservatives but didn't impress the sophisticates, either. ("C'mon Hank, you can tell me!" an Oliphant cartoon syndicated by the *Washington Star* was captioned. "What *were* all those secret discussions about?") Congress moved to extend his temporary tax cut, but not, as he had demanded, alongside accompanying spending cuts to pay for it. He vetoed the bill and the House was not able to override it, but the *Times* called it a defeat for him nonetheless, because "public displeasure about the quality of political leadership will probably be reinforced." Congress adjourned "leaving Mr. Ford the solitary embarrassment of signing legislation that does not give him what he wants"—and which conservatives judged as yet one more liberal sellout. Meanwhile the FEC ruled that Ford's travels paid for by the Republican National Committee were party building, not campaigning, so they need not be counted against his spending limit. A conference of Southern Republicans opened in Houston. Ford decided not to show up—he showed up instead in news pictures falling on his ass while skiing in Vail—and reinforced the snub by sending in his stead Nelson Rockefeller, who insulted the participants: "You got me out, you sons of bitches," he reportedly said; "now get off your asses and help the President." Reagan appeared in Houston and, unsurprisingly, raised the roof.

THAT SUNDAY'S *60 MINUTES*, THE CBS "NEWSMAGAZINE" THAT HAD helped induct millions of middle Americans into the ranks of the suspicious circles with its hard-hitting investigative journalism, and had become that fall the first news show to vault to the top of the network ratings after it moved to a new time slot at 7 P.M. on Sundays, featured a Ralph Nader–style exposé of a factory in Virginia owned by a company called Allied Chemical. Its product, a pesticide called Kepone, was alleged to cause brain damage in its workers. Heartbreakingly, the camera lingered on one tremulous victim who, for an excruciating forty-five seconds, tried and failed to drive in a bolt with a screwdriver. Then *60 Minutes*' new reporter, former White House correspondent Dan Rather, moved in for what would become his trademark on *60 Minutes* (though the style was already familiar to viewers who remembered when the young newsman stood up at a televised news conference in March 1974 in Houston and embarrassed Richard Nixon with the toughest question of his presidency). In the office of the company's director of agricultural research, a man named William Moore, Rather pulled out a sheaf of books—"studies sponsored by Allied Chemical":

"Are you familiar with these materials? This—"

"No."

"Never seen those?"

"Never seen them."

"Right in the summary, very top: 'The characteristic effect of this compound is the development of DDT-like tremors, the severity of which depends upon dosage level and duration of exposure.' Quote, unquote—from the first sentence of the summary. You don't know about this?"

"No, no."

But Mr. Moore, Rather revealed, was the author of that very study.

The suspicious circles were still thrusting. There came next, however, another, very different sort of segment the producers of *60 Minutes* favored: the fluffy celebrity profile. The subject, however, was a politician—one who, in contrast to the story just told, used to say things on the radio like "Right now business is regulated in America by government more than it is in any other country in the world." And that the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration's goal seemed to be to "make a worker completely safe by taking away his job." And who in speeches to business conventions spoke of the nation's preeminent consumer advocate as "Little Sir Ralph who has become a folk hero taking whacks at you with his wooden sword," his minions "attempting to take from you the prerogatives of management without accepting any of the responsibilities that drive you on occasion to a Miltown." (Miltown was a popular tranquilizer; Nancy Reagan took it.)

But *60 Minutes* didn't get into any of that. Instead, after a title card that presented the handsome sixty-four-year-old in a white cowboy hat cocked just so, a jeep rumbled from over the horizon, out of the mountains and into the pale prairie light, filmed heroically from below just the way John Ford shot John Wayne, as Mike Wallace's pleasant voice-over intoned:

"Mr. Right. That's how Nancy Reagan feels about her husband. Apparently it's also about how millions of Republicans feel about Nancy Reagan's husband. For the Gallup poll released just two days ago has him leading the President for the Republican nomination by a full eight points. . . . But while the pundits and the pollsters have been turning Reagan inside out, *60 Minutes* elected to spend some time with Ronald and Nancy Reagan at home in California."

It had always been Ronald Reagan's remarkable gift—ever aware of the gaze of others, reflecting on it, adjusting himself to it, inviting it—to model himself in his mind's eye according to how he presented himself physically to others, adjusting himself to be seen as he wished others to see him, almost as if *he* were the one guiding the cameras that captured his image. Now, as Gerald Ford stumbled, it was how his team managed to reintroduce him to the nation, on the nation's top-rated news show: as an avuncular cowboy naturalist—just folks.

Reagan, from the driver's seat: "Well, we're coming now to what's called Bald Mountain, matter of fact it's on the map."

Wallace, sitting beside him: "Here you are in your six hundred, seven hundred acres at the top of the most beautiful part of California, horses, family. What in the world would persuade you? You've got it made."

"Yeah."

"You've worked hard, you've saved money, you've got a family."

"I don't know, someone said life begins when you begin to serve. Maybe if there's a feeling that you can be of service, then you feel you have to do it."

He was now a rich man, Mike Wallace explained, "but none of his possessions mean as much to him"—the ex-governor in the Western garb was pictured calling to a horse—"as the ranch he bought last year. 'Rancho Cielo,' he calls it. Ranch of Heaven. One senses this is something he and Nancy had yearned for."

(Not quite; Nancy didn't care for any ranch. And at that, when he rode horses he hadn't previously dressed like a cowboy; he rode English style, wearing jodhpurs and boots.)

"Mrs. Reagan, do I understand you met this fellow because you were a subscriber to the *Daily Worker*?"

"There wasn't, but there was a Nancy Davis who was—"

She relayed a version of the dubious story of how they met, interrupted by a bark—"That's our dog Wallace. Hates the Communists just like his mommy and daddy!" Then came a scene from the one movie where they acted together, *Hellcats of the Navy*, two lovebirds walking off into the sunset—and then that cut away to the same shot, only in real life.

Ronnie: "For all the years we've been married it's been *we*, not you and I. It would be inconceivable to me to go my way without her."

Nancy in red sweater and silver-and-turquoise belt, testifying to her husband's cruel victimization at the hands of the press:

"Whenever anyone would say something about Ronnie that I thought was unkind, cruel, or unjust, untrue, I'd go in and I'd take a long bath and carry out imaginary conversations in which—*I—was—just—marvelous.* I'd say all those things you'd hope you'd have a chance to say, and nobody could talk back to you, and I was tremendous! And by the time I was done with the bath, I was OK!"

(That week, *People* magazine featured a "Chinese face reader" expounding on people in the news, including Nancy, "a poised patrician-born"—the article said—"size 6 who often makes best-dressed lists": "*Look at the indirect focus of her eyes; they do not match her expression. She doesn't care about what others feel and may not be open about her own feelings. Perhaps she is fearful she will be found out. . . . She is a vital person and will remain active into old age. But she is out for herself.*")

Wallace read aloud from a new book called *The Power Lovers*, on political marriages: "'Why, my joy is being Mrs. Ronald Reagan.'" (Wallace sounded smug, Nancy looked like she was about to sigh in frustration—*this again* . . .) "'My life began with Ronnie'—and people chuckle."

Unembarrassed, she replied, "Well, they chuckle. But—it did." She smiled defiantly, eyebrows raised.

A public-policy discussion:

"The death penalty?" "I'm in favor of the death penalty." (*Why?*) "Because I think it saves lives. I think people are alive today because of the death penalty." She smiled.

"Abortion?" "I, I can't get over the point of it being that you're killing somebody." She still was smiling. "I can't get beyond that."

"Marijuana. Marijuana seems to be a fact of life," Nancy said softly, ruefully—"unfortunately." "You would obviously not legalize it." "No, I would not be in favor of legalizing it." "We were talking to Maureen, your stepdaughter, and we asked if she could imagine Ronnie and Nancy Reagan sitting there of a summer's night or whenever smoking a joint together." Nancy laughed heartily. "That," Wallace said, "was her reaction to it."

The candidate was lobbed a few softballs: "Governor, some people call you a button-pusher. They're scared to have you in the White House. You wanted to win in Vietnam, you're against détente and the Chinese. You're a hard-liner. You frighten some people." Soothingly, he responded, now in a tan sport coat and shirt and brown tie, with redwoods wallpaper in the background: "*Wellllll*, let me explain. I'm not a hard-liner. Anyone in my generation who's lived through four wars and been part of one of them can't be for anything but peace." And: "The greatest immorality is to ask young men to fight or die for my country if it's not a cause we are willing to win."

Some light political chitchat: George Wallace. Ted Kennedy. Hubert Humphrey, being talked up by pundits as the Democrats' best '76 hope. "Can you beat him?" "Well, I'd sure give it a good country try!"

The "sour" public mood, "corruption at the top . . . pursuit of hedonism, rising crime rates, a lower faith in many of our institutions. How come?" *Easy:* "When you take away from people any sense of responsibility, or any feeling that they have any part in the decisions, or any part in the control, then people do begin to drift and go their own way, I suppose. What's happened to our people is that they have a feeling that government is beyond them, that they cannot influence it."

"Tell me the last time we had a leader we had a good deal of faith in."

"Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He took his case to the people. When the New Deal started he was faced with a Congress that wouldn't go along. He went over their heads with the fireside chats. . . . And he enlightened the people. . . . The greatest leader is not one who does the greatest things. He is the one who gets the people to do the greatest things. And that's what is lacking now."

At home with the Ronald Reagans, as poor Gerald Ford governed and stumbled, stumbled and governed.

"I don't think the system has failed, or that the system has failed us. But I think a great many people have failed the system." Cut back to that jeep for one more ride into the sunset. The ticking *60 Minutes* clock. As, the next day, one more nail was driven into Camelot's coffin, and the Church Committee finally generated a story that riveted the nation.

ON MONDAY A PRETTY FORTY-ONE-YEAR-OLD NAMED JUDITH CAMPBELL Exner, her tanned face obscured behind large saucer-shaped sunglasses, stepped up to press conference microphones in San Diego: "My relationship with Jack Kennedy was of a close, personal nature and did not involve conspiratorial shenanigans of any kind," she said. "We never discussed politics or international affairs. To me, he was Jack Kennedy and not the President."

And why were political or international affairs relevant to the discussion? Because, it turned out, Exner, described on newswires as "a comely brunette woman with a hazy past," *also* had a "relationship" with the two mobsters who had helped the CIA try to assassinate Fidel Castro—but those, too, she avowed, were "of a personal nature and were no way related to or affected by my relationship with Jack Kennedy, nor did I discuss either of them with the other."

The story of the gangsters' moll and the president had begun with an oblique footnote on page 129 of the Church Committee assassination report: "Evidence before the committee indicates that a close friend of President Kennedy had frequent contact with the President from the end of 1960 through mid 1962. FBI reports and testimony indicate that the President's friend was also a close friend of John Roselli and Sam Giancana and saw them often during this same period. . . . White House telephone logs show seventy instances of phone contact between the White House and the President's friend whose testimony confirms frequent phone contact with the President himself. Both the President's friend and Roselli testified that the friend did not know about either the assassination operation or the wire tap case. Giancana was killed before he was available for questioning." That the "close friend" may have been a *close friend* emerged from a staff leak published by two reporters from the Scripps-Howard chain a month earlier. Then, three days before Exner's press conference, *New York Times* columnist William Safire, charging a cover-up by a Church Committee "plumbers' operation," introduced J. Edgar Hoover into the question. He had, Safire reported, met with JFK one March day in 1962, immediately before the Exner-Kennedy calls stopped—which raised what Safire called "substantive questions," such as "Did the Mafia figures encourage the girl's White House relationship, and if so, to what end?" And "Why did Mr. Hoover check with the CIA and then tell a Las Vegas sheriff to stop prosecuting Giancana for wiretapping an unfaithful girlfriend—right after his luncheon showdown with President Kennedy." And whether "the Mafia, by silencing Giancana forever, has clamped down the lid from its end." And whether Hoover had used this leverage to blackmail the Kennedys into wiretapping Martin Luther King.

Or whether the secret of JFK's assassination lurked beneath: "Too many coincidences . . . When the President winds up murdered by a supporter of Castro, target of the aborted CIA assassination plot, the matter is worth a thorough public examination."

Exner said she called her press conference to close off just such "lurid speculation." Not likely. A reporter delicately asked if she had ever met Kennedy's wife; Exner replied that she hadn't. A less decorous newsman came straight out with it: "Did you ever go to bed with John Fitzgerald Kennedy?" Exner responded, "That's in the personal arena"—her lawyer adding that he had her full testimony, transcribed and documented, stored in a secure area, "to be released at a proper time and in a proper manner."

Once more Kennedy family retainers popped out of the woodwork to proclaim incredulity. "I think there's a campaign to give it to the Kennedys," said JFK's personal secretary Kenny O'Donnell, who claimed that there were "no secret passages" in the presidential appointment book he kept, and that "there is not much in his life after 1957 that I didn't know about." "Even Jacqueline Kennedy didn't have lunch twenty times with the President," he added of claims of sixteen to twenty White House visits by Exner—perhaps revealing more than he intended. Senator Church called claims that his committee had covered up the story for partisan reasons "preposterous"—details irrelevant to the investigation had been withheld by unanimous agreement of committee senators, and if there had been evidence that the president's liaison had been brokered by the mafia, "we would have included it in the report." Exner wouldn't name the friend who introduced her to Kennedy and then to Giancana, though speculation centered on Frank Sinatra, who came out with an eleven-word statement to the press: "Hell hath no fury like a hustler with a literary agent."

Safire assiduously fueled the fire. Richard Nixon had been last seen in public print running from a *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reporter who stalked him at the eighteenth hole at his retreat in San Clemente for a two-part profile ("Nixon Believes His Memoirs Will Vindicate Him") depicting a pale, pathetic man pocked with liver spots, begging Rabbi Korff to raise funds to keep him solvent, and playing golf for eight hours straight every day except when an errant shot frustrated him and he quit after seven. Only in the columns of the former PR flack Safire was he still a great man—or at least, no less great than his Democratic forebears, who were actually much, much worse. It had been Safire's project since joining the *Times*. Like J. J. Hunsecker, the scabrous scribe played by Burt Lancaster in *Sweet Smell of Success*, in his op-ed page essays he took advantage of a columnists' license to introduce literary techniques that would have gotten a reporter fired had he tried them in the news pages—insinuating questions, dubious "coincidences," morbid speculation, guilt by association, character assassination—to establish, as he put it on December 8, "the greatest cover-up of all . . . the suppression of truth about Democratic precedents to Watergate, on the grounds that it might ameliorate the hatred being focused on Richard Nixon." On December 22, in his first column after the Exner press conference, he trumpeted “murder and attempted murder at the highest level that spans fifteen years”: Castro, Kennedy, and now Sam Giancana, “who presumably encouraged one of his girls to nourish a White House-Mafia liaison . . . the dead body of Sam Giancana lies across Frank Church's path to the Presidency.” For these ambitions, Safire claimed, Church had closed the books on a murder most foul, threatening perjury and warning of lie detector tests to staffers who wouldn't get with the program. *But.* “Senator Church cannot slam the lid of Pandora's box back down now that he has glimpsed the evil that lurks therein.”

The luridness was only beginning. Though at least with Exner the claim could be reasonably made that a matter of public interest was at stake. Then came Fiddle and Faddle:

“When Judith Campbell Exner said last week that she had ‘a close personal’ relationship with Jack Kennedy she was only confirming what had long been a matter of open and widespread speculation.” Speculate no more, said *Time* magazine in the issue that appeared on newsstands the day before Christmas. There was the time the thirty-fifth president startled the British prime minister and foreign minister by confiding that “if he went too long without a woman, he suffered severe headaches.” Jayne Mansfield claimed an affair with Kennedy lasting three years and “[t]here is little doubt that Marilyn Monroe also had a sexual relationship with the President” (they met—the claim was sourced to a Hollywood gossip writer—at the Carlyle Hotel, the Beverly Hills Hotel, Peter Lawford's house in Santa Monica, the White House, “and even in the Kennedy private plane, the Caroline”). There were also airline stewardesses. And, during the 1960 Democratic National Convention, after claiming he was off to meet with his father, there was a “diplomat's wife he had known for some time.” And a “smashing brunette” sent over as a gift by a newsman (“I got your message—both of them”). The woman who suffered the interruption of “[t]wo top foreign affairs advisers with a batch of secret cables.” (“Never bothering to close the door, Kennedy cooled down, read the dispatches, and made his decision before he returned to his friend.”) And last but not least, “two women who displayed few secretarial skills but worked on his staff” and were described by British dramatist Jonathan Miller as looking “like unused tennis balls—they had the fuzz still on them” and were “assigned quarters near the President and were code-named ‘Fiddle’ and ‘Faddle’ by the Secret Service.”

Then there were the tales *Time* repeated from a book by the former White House kennel keeper—“impossible to verify”—that “Jack would sometimes lounge naked around the White House swimming pool when

Jackie was away, and women would arrive, undress, and join him,” and that once “Jackie allegedly found a woman's undergarment tucked into a pillow slip. She is supposed to have said calmly to Jack: ‘Would you please shop around and see who these belong to? They're not my size.’” A reader wrote in that the article showed how it was “possible to assassinate someone twice.”

ON DECEMBER 21, IN VIENNA, SIX MILITANTS FROM THE “ARM OF THE Arab Revolution” group forced their way into a meeting of OPEC leaders, issued a communiqué demanding a “total liberation war” against Israel, took sixty hostages, and killed three, before, the next day, releasing their surviving charges in Tripoli. Now, it appeared, the people by whose command flowed the lifeblood of entire global economy, petroleum, were at the mercy of a terrorist known as “Carlos the Jackal.” The next week, in New York, terrorists took advantage of peak holiday travel to explode a bomb, equivalent to twenty-five sticks of dynamite, that they had hidden in a coin locker—collapsing the floor and ceiling, hurling shrapnel from the metal lockers that pierced through flesh and left body parts scattered throughout the main baggage claim area at La Guardia Airport. Fourteen people were killed. No one ever claimed responsibility. No perpetrator was ever found. “Terrorism,” FBI director Clarence Kelley said, “is, indeed, the ultimate evil in our society. And no one can consider himself immune from terrorist acts.” Most shockingly of all, “some otherwise law-abiding people provide moral and material support to terrorists, apparently for idealistic reasons”—like the people who had gladly kept Patty Hearst, whose trial was set to begin in two weeks, from justice in her fourteen months on the lam.

La Guardia was the eighty-ninth bombing in the United States attributable to terrorist activity in 1975, compared with forty-five in 1974 and twenty-four in 1973. What would 1976 bring?

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Negatives Are Positives

AT CHRISTMASTIME IN 1897, AN EIGHT-YEAR-OLD GIRL FROM NEW YORK wrote to a newspaper editor, "Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. . . . Please tell me the truth; is there a Santa Claus." The editor responded for the ages: "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus."

At Christmastime in 1975, two girls asked the same question of a columnist, Alan MacLeese, at the *Flint Journal* in Michigan. He wrote back, "No, Gretchen and Stacy, there is no such man."

America was trying to celebrate. It really was. At the Waldorf-Astoria in New York, 1976 was rung in with Guy Lombardo's orchestra leading a sing-along of "Happy Birthday, America"; in Philadelphia, it was rung in with the midnight ride of the Liberty Bell from Independence Hall to a large building where it would welcome tourists all during the nation's Bicentennial year; the next morning, in Pasadena, California, Kate Smith offered her famous rendition of "God Bless America" as grand marshal of the Rose Bowl Parade. But streetside revelers who opened their copies of the *Los Angeles Times* during a lull in the proceedings could read the offering that morning of columnist Robert J. Donovan: "The inescapable commentary of fading 1975 and its several predecessors is that, combined, they are sending the country into bicentennial 1976 in such a state of disillusion and moral confusion that no one is sure how best to celebrate the nation's 200th birthday."

In Cleveland, the *Plain Dealer* editorialized that "1975 was at least something of an improvement over 1974," though whether 1976 might be an improvement over that was "a mystery." Under the dark penumbra of Watergate; the revelations about that womanizer and would-be assassin of Castro, John F. Kennedy (who according to the new book *The Search for JFK* had been a terrible naval commander to boot, who did not "save his crew" after a Japanese warship rammed his PT boat, instead his negligence having been responsible for the sinking itself); the wave of bombings and kidnappings in America and around the world—and who was to say, the *Plain Dealer* mused, that mad terrorists might not soon

have nukes—"as the New Year arrives it sometimes seems as if modern government is helpless." The Census Bureau came out with a new report on marriage: it was on the way out, with the number of people between 25 and 34 years old who had never been married increasing by half since 1970. One-parent families were skyrocketing too, from 1.6 to 7.2 million. The journalist Elizabeth Drew, in her weekly "Journal" column in the *New Yorker*, wrote, of the nation's two-hundredth birthday, "we don't seem to know how to celebrate it. There is a vague feeling that the merchandisers have already made off with the occasion, and that the orators will bore us to death . . . there is also an uneasiness about celebrating. Our history began so grandly, and it doesn't seem so grand anymore."

Her catalogue of horrors included Watergate, of course. ("We had had a kind of faith that we would never elect a really bad man as President.") And inflation. And the "threat of widespread food shortages; the continuing energy problem; the threatening scarcity of other natural resources." And the "continuing social and economic plight of the country's black people; the crisis of the cities; the increasing number of ecological problems." And "the excesses, at home and abroad, of our secret intelligence-gathering agencies." She also interviewed Senator Adlai Stevenson III of Illinois, who added capitalism itself to the list of society's failures: "The institutions of free enterprise," he told the *New Yorker*, "are not equal to the realities of the new era: cartels, fixed prices, commodity shortages."

A PRESS RELEASE ANNOUNCED ONE CELEBRATION: "ONE HUNDRED YEARS ago, an enterprising and forward-looking New York publisher, Mrs. Charles F. Deihm, had an idea, to create a depository of materials gathered at the time of the United States Centennial celebration that could be unveiled 100 years later." The unveiling took place in January in a lobby of the U.S. Capitol. "Happy birthday, America!" Congresswoman Lindy Boggs cried from the ceremonial dais; members of Congress's Joint Committee on Arrangements for the Commemoration of the Bicentennial sat arrayed beside her. The House and Senate chaplains said prayers; Senator Mark Hatfield of Oregon, representing Vice President Rockefeller, president of the Senate, presented the official Bicentennial flag—it featured a red-white-and-blue star with modishly rounded corners—to House Speaker Carl Albert and said there were already eight thousand of them flying around the country. Carl Albert said, "We meet today under very inspiring circumstances."

And thereupon, with fanfare, the double doors to the elegant blacklacquered safe, reposing patiently in a Capitol storeroom lo these last hundred years, fanned open. But these ended up opening only to another set of locked doors, so all they could access was a written message: "It is the wish of Mrs. Deihm that this safe may remain closed until July 4, 1976."

Crushingly appropriate, that anticlimax. It seemed like nothing worked in America anymore. People's lives were not working; the previous November, Ann Landers received a letter from a young couple who asked the columnist to poll her readership to ask if having a child would be worth it—"Were the rewards enough to make up for the grief?" The letters poured in, and on January 23, she tallied up the score: 70 percent told her *no*. Wrote a forty-year-old with young twins, "I was an attractive, fulfilled career woman before I had these kids. Now I'm an overly exhausted nervous wreck." Said a seventy-year-old mother of five, "Not one of our children has given us any pleasure. God knows we did our best, but we were failures as parents, and they are failures as people."

Failures as people: millions of Americans felt that this description fit them to a T. Seeking a solution, any solution, they eagerly forked over their cash to any huckster who promised release, the quicker and more effortlessly the better: therapies like "bioenergetics" ("The Revolutionary Therapy That Uses the Language of the Body to Heal the Problems of the Mind"); Primal Scream (which held that when patients shrieked in a therapist's office, childhood trauma could be reexperienced, then released; John Lennon and James Earl Jones were fans); or Transcendental Meditation, which promised that deliverance could come if you merely closed your eyes and chanted a mantra (the "TM" organization sold personal mantras, each supposedly "unique," to hundreds of thousands of devotees). Or "religions" like the Church Universal and Triumphant, or the Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church, or "Scientology"—this last one invented by a science fiction writer, reportedly on a bet. Devotees paid cash to be "audited" by practitioners who claimed the power—if, naturally, you paid for enough sessions—to remove "trauma patterns" accreted over the 75 million years that had passed since Xenu, tyrant of the Galactic Confederacy, deposited billions of people on earth next to volcanoes and detonated hydrogen bombs inside those volcanos, thus scattering harming "body thetans" to attach to the souls of the living, which once unlatched allowed practitioners to cross the "bridge to total freedom" and "unlimited creativity." Another religion, the story had it, promised "perfect knowledge"—though its adherents' public meeting was held up several hours because none of them knew how to run the movie projector. Gallup reported that six million Americans had tried TM, five million had twisted themselves into yoga poses, and two million had sampled some sort of Oriental religion.

And hundreds of thousands of Americans in eleven cities had plunked down $250 for the privilege being screamed at as "assholes."

"est"—*E*rhard *S*eminars *T*raining, named after the only-in-America hustler who invented it, Werner Erhard, originally Jack Rosenberg, a former used-car and encyclopedia salesman who had tried and failed to join the Marines (this was not incidental) at the age of seventeen, and experienced a spiritual rebirth one morning while driving across the Golden Gate Bridge ("I realized that I knew nothing. . . . In the next instant—after I realized that I knew nothing—I realized that I knew everything")—promised "to transform one's ability to experience living so that the situations one had been trying to change or had been putting up with, clear up just in the process of life itself," all that in just sixty hours, courtesy of a for-profit corporation whose president had been general manager of the Coca-Cola Bottling Company of California and a former member of the Harvard Business School faculty.

A journalist decided to go through the process and write a book about it. He described showing up at 9 A.M. with 239 others at a Howard Johnson's conference room in Boston for the first of four all-day sessions over two successive weekends, and at the start being forced to leave his watch at the door. He sat down in a hard-backed chair—the organizers made sure these chairs were uncomfortable—and heard the rules he would have to agree to in order to stay. They were read out in a mechanical drone: no food or drink (the meal break came at nine at night); no talking; no taking notes, chewing gum, reading, sitting next to someone you knew, or making any trips to the bathroom (the bathroom break came after twelve hours); don't discuss what happens in est training with anyone other than est graduates. Over those sixty hours everything would be controlled, right down to how acolytes were to hold the microphone. ("Stand up. Extend your arms. Now make a fist with your left hand around your right thumb. Now with your left thumb extended outward . . .")

"*Keep your ass in the room . . . follow the instructions, and take what you get. . . . The reasons why our lives don't work, the reason why you're assholes, is that you don't keep your agreements! . . . You assholes keep your agreements with me and your lives will work. Is everybody clear on that now?*"

The trainer invited questions. The acolytes, careful to extend their